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# SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY

AND

## OTHER STUDIES

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
1. Comedy in Shakespeare ... ..	1
2. Hamlet : An Interpretation ... ..	98
3. Two Misjudged Characters in Shakespeare ...	122
4. The Monosyllable in Shakespeare ... ..	135
5. Shakespeare and Sleep ... ..	152
6. Shakespeare's Treatment of Madness ... ..	162



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To one who has been teacher, guide and friend I dedicate this volume. In his words I have found wisdom and in his companionship joy.

The functions of a teacher of literature begin and end with the discovery and interpretation of literary beauty. To love literature and make others share in this love is his sufficient justification. It is my hope that these papers on Shakespeare have something new in them and some old things in a new shape.

A. J.

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# COMEDY IN SHAKESPEARE

( 1 )

( A great American humorist has said that comedy keeps the heart sweet.) So much has been written on the subject of comedy generally that it is surprising that hardly any adequate study of Comedy in Shakespeare has been attempted. Comedy has been tacitly ignored as the production of his immaturity ; attention has been focussed on his tragedies which have been regarded as touching the height of his genius. As I shall venture to suggest, this has resulted in producing an incorrect idea of Shakespeare's art and philosophy.

( 2 )

Numerous definitions of Comedy have been offered, mostly, and inevitably, by those who have never written any themselves. But that is the way of all criticism. Aristotle, who had only a few comedies as his models, considered, in his *Rhetoric*, that the essence of the comic lies in 'incongruity,' which produces an emotional shock. In the *Poetics*, he is a little more definite : " Comedy is an imitation of characters of a lower type—not, however, in the full sense of the word 'bad,' the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the Ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive." This early notion that Comedy was to laugh at people of low rank (and Tragedy to arouse pity and terror by the ruin of the most beautiful and excellent life) held the



ground practically all through the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century, Castelvetro wrote : " Comedy, being entirely concerned with the ludicrous, uses only such characters as are of poor spirit and mean estate." About the same time Thomas Wilson said in his *Art of Rhetorique*, " The occasion of laughter is the fondness, the filthiness, the deformitie, and all such evil behaviour, as we see to be in other." Thomas Hobbes (*Human Nature*) says about the passion which produces laughter that it is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly. This Aristotelian idea has not even to our own day been entirely given up. Professor Stoll in his recent book entitled " Studies in Shakespeare," thinks that comic effect resides in a momentary shock of incongruity.

There are other theories, too. Quintilian (*De Institutione Oratorio*, vi, 3) shows a wider appreciation of the comic idea when he divides it into six forms: urbanitas, venustum, salsum, facetum, iocus and dicacitas. Voltaire is definitely against Aristotle's theory ; laughter, according to him, arises from a gaiety of disposition, absolutely incompatible with contempt and indignation.† Another great Frenchman, whose *Le Rire* has won considerable praise, Bergson goes to the older idea when he says : " In laughter we always find an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour."†

Apart from these two sets of views, there is a third which explains Comedy differently. In one of his " Imaginary Conversations," that between Alfieri and the Jew Saloman, Landor says that genuine humour and true wit require a sound and capacious mind, which is always a grave one. Carlyle, following the lead of Richter, says : " True humour springs not more from the head than



from the heart, it is not contempt, its essence is love, it issues not in laughter, but in smiles which lie far deeper. It is a sort of inverse sublimity, exalting as it were, into our affection what is below us, while sublimity draws down into our affections what is above us." From this there is a natural transition to Meredith, whose 'Essay on Comedy' is one of the most thoughtful contributions on the subject. { "The test of true comedy," he says, "is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter." } X

This conception of Comedy, it will be seen, differs materially from most others. ( Comedy, Meredith says further, laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it ; and it might be called the humour of the mind. Turning next to the subjects on which the comic spirit loves to play, Meredith proceeds : " Men's future upon earth does not attract it ; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does ; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate ; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly ; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another ; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice ; are false in humility or mixed with conceit, individually or in the bulk,—the spirit overhead will look humanely malign and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter." )

( 3 )

Now, theories apart, in actual practice, what do we find? It is of course a commonplace of literature that no work of art has ever been produced to suit a theory.



An artist does not first enunciate consciously an artistic theorem and then produce his work to fit in with it. He speaks because of an inner urge. He must, if he has the gift of expression, utter the thoughts and feelings that agitate him, whether of a pleasant or of a sad character. The joy of creation makes him forget all canons of criticism and philosophy. But as even artistic production is bound to be the result of the artist's whole past, his temperament, his intellectual equipment, his emotional experiences, his environment and his age, it is useful to examine his work and deduce from it such general principles as we reasonably can. It is possible that we may find not one of these theories adequately ratified by the comic writers.

Why do we laugh? At what do we laugh? Do we all laugh? Meredith divides the world into non-laughers and over-laughers, Puritans and Bacchanalians. Is laughter, as Bergson says, a froth with a saline base? Does it indeed sparkle like froth? "But the philosopher who gathers a handful to taste may find that the substance is scanty, and the after-taste bitter." Are we sure? Is there always an admixture of bitterness with laughter? Professor Dowden has—without professing to prepare a scientific list—drawn attention to ten varieties of comedy. He refers to Juvenal's laughter of passionate indignation; to Rabelais' huge buffoonery; to Cervantes' deep melancholy mirth; to Moliere's laughter of unerring good sense; to Milton's fierce, objurgatory laughter; to Voltaire's quick intellectual scorn and eager malice of the brain; to the urbane and amiable play of Addison's invention; to Fielding's careless mastery of the whole broad common field of mirth; to Sterne's exquisite curiosity of oddness; and to the tragic laughter of Swift. The qualifying adjectives used by Dowden indicate more the nature



of the comedies than their sources. It is important, however, to consider the origin of the comic feeling.

✓ (If tragedy is impressed with earnestness, comedy is marked by the absence of seriousness. It calls forth hilarity and mirth.) But how does it excite this hilarity? (The comic feeling is complex.) It is no part of the aim of the present paper to enter into a deep psychological examination of the subject. That has been done by Hegel (*Philosophy of Fine Art*), Schopenhauer (*The World as Will and Idea*), Bain (*The Emotions and the Will*), Höffding (*Outlines of Psychology*), Lipps (*Komik und Humor*), Bergson (*Le Rire*), Sully (*Essay on Laughter*), Freud (*Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*), Max Eastman (*The Sense of Humor*), and Greig (*Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*). But confining ourselves to broad facts, we may say that we first laugh at imperfection. (1) ✓ This is only one source of laughter. In early comedies masks were used ; motley's the only wear, says Touchstone. Some feature of a man's figure was exaggerated—an inordinately long nose, or thick overhanging lips or a hunched back. It was necessary, however, that there should be no indication of pain. If a man squints constantly, we laugh ; if he stammers we laugh also. But there is no malice in the laughter) If, however, a man we do not like is hurt, and we laugh, there is spleen in our laugh, and it ceases to be comic. ✓ (We laugh at imperfections in the comic sense, first because we are conscious of our own superiority in this regard, and next because we realise that these imperfections do not really matter much, are not in fact of a serious nature. That our sense of superiority is implicit is proved by the fact that others suffering from the same imperfections do not join us in the laugh.) ✕

✓ (Laughter may be produced next by the unconscious



misuse of words. Of this the best example in dramatic literature is, of course, Mrs. Malaprop, in Sheridan's *Rivals*.<sup>†</sup> Almost her first words are a request to Lydia to "illiterate him [Beverley] quite from your memory." This is a solitary shock, and we do not quite realise what this mistake is due to. Then when she says she has proof 'controvertible'—the foible is repeated, and we know what to expect from her. The play is replete with gems from the Malapropian store—'supercilious knowledge in accounts'; 'the very pine-apple of politeness'; 'it gives me the hydrostatics to such a degree'; 'Sir, if I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of epitaphs'; 'an allegory on the banks of Nile'; 'his physiognomy so grammatical.' As soon, then, as she opens her lips, we prepare ourselves for laughter. (Here, again, the laugh is comic because there is nothing serious in this misuse of words.)<sup>†</sup>

Allied to this is the laughter produced by a parody of another's style of speech.<sup>†</sup> When Hamlet uses the affected style of Osric and says—"Sir, his definement suffers no perdition in you; though, I know, to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory, and yet but yaw neither, in respect of his quick sail. But in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article; and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror; and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more."—(we realise that he is making fun of the bewildered courtier, and with Hamlet we laugh at Osric. The motive to correct is concealed behind the laugh.)<sup>×</sup>

We laugh at an imitation of any incongruous gesture or physical peculiarity.<sup>×</sup> In the old Morality plays Vice appeared in special garments which immediately singled



him out for humorous ridicule. ✓ The comic sense is aggravated when the person concerned is himself not aware of his peculiarity. Then we laugh at incongruous remarks, and at mock seriousness. ✓ In the *Merchant of Venice*, Launcelot Gobbo says to his father—"Talk not of Master Launcelot, father; for the young gentleman, according to Fates and Destinies and such odd sayings, the Sisters Three and such branches of learning, is indeed deceased, or as you would say in plain terms, gone to heaven." (This mock seriousness makes us laugh and we are amused by the father's look of sorrow because we know there is really no cause for it.) In the same play we are amused by the incongruity in Shylock's twofold grief over the loss of his daughter and his ducats :

"My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!  
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!"

✓ The laughter here is just saved from being converted into tears. The sense of sorrow is indeed not entirely absent. But the loss of the ducats is regarded by the Jew as being as important as that of his daughter : it is this incongruity that makes us laugh at him.

✓ We are moved to laughter by the sight of or satirical comments on defects such as drunkenness, laziness, corpulence, cowardice, bragging. This feeling can, unless the artist is skilful, easily degenerate into one of disgust or contempt, and then laughter disappears. We can laugh only so long as the faults are not vicious. ✕ A drunkard may be a pleasant enough companion ; (we will laugh at his potions and his want of control over his movements only so long as our sense of security is not affected. But if he becomes dangerous we clap him into prison and the comic sense is not in evidence.

✓ Laughter may be caused by mistakes in identity.



Several comedies are based on this. The mistake may arise either through extreme resemblance, or through some other cause. Here again we laugh only because nothing serious happens. If any catastrophe is threatened, our suspense grows keen and we abstain from laughter altogether. †

Laughter is produced too by indecenty, mainly of a physical nature. Curious though it may seem, the obscene, the indecent, the abnormal amuses us greatly. Perhaps our laughter is aroused as a defence to our innate or acquired sense of modesty. We laugh so as not to consider the suggestions of indecency and obscenity seriously. Obviously this kind of laughter will be regulated by the public taste of the age. The Greeks of the time of Aristophanes were used to the public exhibition, at some ceremonies, of the phallus. The audience would not laugh at it if it were just exhibited on the stage. In order, however, to excite their laughter, the comedians gave to the phallus an abnormal size. That, then, was what amused them : not the thing itself, but its unusual size. We also laugh at the obscene on the stage because civilization taboos it in society. Jokes against the mother-in-law, the henpecked husband, the cuckold, are common and always produce a laugh. This kind of comedy began with Aristophanes, and through the Italians filtered down to England to appear during the Restoration and was called Sentimental Comedy. X

We laugh at what is old, obsolete and unfashionable, whether in ideas and beliefs or in dress and manners, provided that dignity is absent. Here again the audience will determine whether there will be laughter or not. A set of young, care-free gallants will laugh at a middle aged or ancient person falling in love or preaching to a scapegrace son. But a number of parents seeing the same



scene will find nothing to amuse them. This leads one to agree with Mr. Greig that "Nothing is laughable in itself ; the laughable borrows its special quality from some person or group of persons who happen to laugh at it, and unless you happen also to know a good deal about this person or group of persons, you cannot by any means guarantee the laugh beforehand." X

## ( 4 )

This analysis takes us to the forms of the Comic Drama. Proceeding on the basis that we laugh at the things mentioned above, we come to five more or less distinct types of comedy. We have the comedy which is a type of burlesque, as in Aristophanes ; the comedy which is akin to romance ; the comedy which is concerned primarily with incident, as in the Italian farce ; the comedy of manners, as in Restoration drama ; and the comedy of character, as in Moliere. )X

## ( 5 )

The Elizabethan theatre, says Professor Ashley Thorndike in his new book on English Comedy, was responding to the taste of its audience, fostered by a long dramatic tradition which desired no sharp separation of the emotions but preferred to take its tragic and comic, its tears and laughter well mixed. It was this which led Sir Philip Sidney to remark that there were "no right comedies and no right tragedies but only a mongrel sort of tragi-comedy." Milton, in the last years of his active poetic career, felt bound to enter a similar protest in his preface to *Samson Agonistes* : "This is mentioned to vindicate tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common interludes ; happening through the poet's error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and



gravity ; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd ; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people."

Whether as a concession to the taste of his day or as the result of a conscious philosophy of life, Shakespeare wrote no 'right comedies and no right tragedies.' Sidney was not referring, of course, to Shakespeare, though Milton probably was ; but in spite of all the array of learned critics who evolve a theory of tragedy out of his plays, his philosophy, I submit, was whole, consistent, and in the main the same from the first of his plays to the last. There is more maturity, greater firmness, more confidence, as he grows older ; but the essentials remain unaltered.

In his *Symposium* Plato had explained that it was the business of one and the same man to be master of tragic and comic composition. "All opposites can be fully understood only by and through each other ; consequently we can only know what is serious by knowing also what is laughable and ludicrous." All through the list of Shakespeare's plays we shall find a combination of humour and pathos in greater or less measure. No play is wholly and merely tragic or comic. He, even more truly than Sophocles, saw life steadily and saw it whole. He is free and out-tops knowledge even as life is free and beyond the farthest reaches of knowledge. He is a mystery and yields to no formula. He is a law to himself. No one had preceded him, none has ventured to follow him. †

It was Horace Walpole who said that life is a tragedy to him who feels and a comedy to him who thinks. This distinction may be sound enough for others, but it is inadequate for Shakespeare whose mind, in Hazlitt's words, contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself. He is enigmatic ; but rather from abundant wealth than from taciturnity. In him there is every species of



passion, every shade of character. If he has excelled in the creation and depiction of one type, he has equally excelled in the portrayal of others. Shakespeare laughs at any attempt to label his plays : no sharp line of division is possible or wise—"tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible, or poem unlimited." ) \*

✓ When we speak of comedy in Shakespeare we must bear this difficulty in mind. Dowden describes his humour as his baffling self-defence. But it enables us at any rate to realise that at no time of his career was he so lacking in sense of proportion, in an understanding of correct values, so tempest-tossed, so inevitably in the depths of anguish or despair, so deaf to the sweet voice of humanity, so frantic in his rage against the sorry scheme of things entire, as to be blind to the mingled texture we call life. Never did he fail to be moved by the sense of tears in things human ; but also, never was he deaf to the disarming sound of human laughter. Tears ; yes, when necessary ; but laughter also, for life is essentially worth living. He was not like Beaumarchais who, in the manner of Byron and 'Obermann,' exclaimed, "Make haste to laugh lest we should begin to cry." His was no such forced laughter. (It sprang rather from the pure and eternal fountain of wisdom and was regardless of age and environment.)

✓ Johnson lays down his obiter dictum that Shakespeare's tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct. Mr. Courteney is of the opinion that Shakespeare as a writer of comedies was a good deal inferior to Shakespeare as the author of tragedies. ✱ Although Milton's Il Penseroso thought that in later age the buskin'd stage had rarely been ennobled, the general trend of Shakespearean criticism has been to regard his tragedies as his principal



work and his comedies as the immature productions of a raw unproven lad. ✓ But the sense of tragedy and the sense of comedy were both always present in his mind, in greater or less measure. ✕ The marvel is that all through the years of storm and stress he succeeded in retaining a healthy, safe, and essentially optimistic outlook on life. We may lay down what formula we choose. 'On the tops,' 'in the depths,' and the rest are attractive labels which lead us nowhere. Fantasy, sentiment, romance ; ghosts and fairies and spirits ; murder, patricide, regicide ; infidelity, jealousy, treachery ; love and friendship and devotion : of this life is an amalgam. If we cast our horoscopes narrowly, we come to grief. But grief is not our sole portion. It may come to us, through our own defects of character, or flaw of heredity, or adverse circumstances, or perhaps Destiny ; but in spite of it, we can retain our opinion that "God's in His Heaven, and all's right with the world." ✓ All is right in Shakespeare's world. There never is darkness of despair, never the gloom of doubt. ✕

## (6)

✓ "Shakespeare made laughter wise and taught seriousness how to be winning and gracious." The French writer and critic, M. Chevrillon, says : "Melancholy is linked with joy, emotion with humour, tenderness with petulant wit." We shall find that Shakespeare goes deeper than Chevrillon thinks. He is deeply impressed with the joy of life : not in the sense in which Wordsworth was, with animal pleasures, nor in Browning's 'mere living'—but in a sense more deeply rooted, "far more deeply interfused." ✕ "With mirth and laughter led old wrinkles come." Gratiano says to Antonio :

"Fish not with this melancholy bait."

"Motley is the only wear," Jaques solemnly assures



the Duke. Death, misfortune, ruin are all compensated for by beauty and love and joy. Even in the comedies the misery or happiness of many lives is in suspense, but still the gay touch is never absent. As though summing up his wisdom in one phrase Prospero says :

“ Be cheerful, sir.”

And why, forsooth? Because

“ These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits and

Are melted into air, into thin air ;

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve

And, like the insubstantial pageant faded,

Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.”

If this indeed is life, a breath, a wind, a tinkling of the camel-bell, why need we give ourselves up to doubt and antagonism and dejection for its little affairs if they gang agley? Let us enjoy life, yes, even its foolery ; but not even Falstaff is allowed to think that life is all foolery—“ I know thee not, old man,” says the metamorphosed King Henry, “ fall to thy prayers. How ill white hairs become a fool and jester.” And when he dies, Mistress Quickly in her devoted manner becomes pathetic :

“ Nay, sure, he's not in hell : he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. A' made a finer end and went away an it had been any christom child ; a' parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide :



for after I saw him fumble with the sheets and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way ; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and a' babbled of green fields."

Thus died one who has been well described as the enemy of everything serious, and he is sure to be in "Arthur's bosom"—he, the drunkard, the liar and the braggart, all because he was never grave or serious in life!

## (7)

✓ The various Shakespearean Comedies have been described as comedy of dialogue, of incident, of romance, lyrical comedy, comedy of character, and pastoral comedy. Comedy, in the various plays, is caused by several factors. In *Romeo and Juliet* laughter is produced by a wit—combat.† The phrase 'silver sound' gives rise to the following dialogue :

*Peter.* Why silver sound? Why music with her silver sound?

*First Minstrel.* Marry, sir, because silver hath a sweet sound.

*Peter.* Pretty, what say you, Hugh Rebeck?

*Second Minstrel.* I say 'silver sound' because musicians sound for silver.

✓ Laughter is produced in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by incongruity.† The Duke, Hermia and the Athenian lovers and Bottom, of all of them Puck says—"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" We laugh at melancholy in *As You Like It*, or at least at an affectation of it.) In the *Twelfth Night*, the laugh is against pomposity and virtuosity. We are amused in *The Merchant of Venice* by smart conversation and by the discomfiture of a man we do not like because he is not good. In the two *Henry IV* plays the



centre of laughter from which humour radiates is Sir John Falstaff and his boon companions. We do not laugh at him so much as with him, even though he frankly says—"I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." (Then in the tragedies, too, there is laughter, only it is laughter with a difference. The eyes that have kept watch o'er man's mortality can no more keep the tears back. Shakespeare laughs, but he selects grim and terrible subjects for laughter. He laughs at skulls and madness and death and hell.) In *Hamlet* the grave-diggers and their talk make us laugh, as also the sly comments of the Prince on Osric's style of conversation. (In *Julius Caesar* too there are occasions for laughter when the citizens decide to tear Cinna, the poet to pieces only because he bears the same name as the conspirator.) De Quincey wrote a wonderfully clever essay on the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*. There is laughter in the queer comments of the Porter, but here too it is laughter connected with Beelzebub and hanging and hell. In *Lear* one of the more important minor characters is the Fool who makes fun of the old king and laughs at him and prevents for a time his complete lapse into insanity. Lear appreciates the importance of the foolery and almost his last words are those of grief at his death—"And my poor fool is hang'd." There is a clown in *Othello* and the laugh is always against the egregious Roderigo. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the clown makes his appearance, although for a brief moment. He brings in a basket and talks in the approved style of fools even as Cleopatra prepares to wear her robe and put on her crown and has immortal longings in her. X

In the last set of his plays, miscalled plays of reconciliation, *Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Winter's Tale*, there is plenty of laughter, but it is subdued and kept under



control. ✓ Caliban is a ludicrous figure and we laugh at him, but there is a little sense of dread mixed with it. We laugh at Cloten, but he has the power to do harm. There is a Clown in *Winter's Tale*). ✕

✓ At no stage of his dramatic career was Shakespeare unmindful of the need of laughter. ✕ Whether it was the delighted laughter of the early plays, or the bitter sardonic laughter of the middle plays, or the gracious laughter of the last plays, the dramatist was all through alive to its necessity and desirability.

( 8 )

✓ ( The statement made above that Shakespeare wrote no right comedy and no right tragedy needs to be demonstrated. ✕ We have grown so used to the traditional division that any departure from it seems alarming. ) That some difficulty has been experienced and some confusion created is clear from the very first edition of Heminge and Condell who classified *Cymbeline* and *Pericles* among the tragedies and *The Tempest* among the comedies. So great indeed is the force of tradition in criticism that even modern editions frequently include *Cymbeline* among the tragedies and learned scholars justify this inclusion. ✓ If Shakespeare's plays can submit to any rules of classification, it can be only this : that a play in which the hero or heroine attains happiness and success in the end is a comedy, and a play in which the hero or heroine dies is a tragedy. This basis of classification is unsatisfactory. But no other is possible. Here, as elsewhere, Shakespeare eludes our rules ; here, as elsewhere, we have to make a Shakespearean rule. And this rule is that there is no pure tragedy and no pure comedy. If the drama is indeed to hold the mirror up to nature, the dramatist dare not misrepresent nature. He will do so at his peril : he will



do so at the expense of truth. He will cease to be catholic and degenerate into being the mouthpiece of a small section. Life is not unmixed joy nor unmixed sorrow. If there is sunshine there are clouds too. The joy of birth is tempered by the grief of death. Union alternates with separation. Fruition is succeeded by failure. Despair yields to hope. But in spite of this, through disease and disaster, amidst rocks and whirlpools, despite foes and calumniators, mankind likes life, dreads its cessation, enjoys it when possible, and blindly, pathetically, clings to the hope that all will yet be well. The hope may be foolish : all may in the end be quite the opposite of what he expects. But there is a comfort, a beauty, in this hope : it is mankind's great charter. X How can a great artist create any work which will go against this hope? The mere fact that he creates, that he considers it worth his while to produce a thing of beauty, the joy he experiences in the working of his creative instinct is a proof that his pessimism is merely surface-deep. Real pessimism will never be found in any great artist. Inferno leads to Paradise ; Paradise Lost will be Paradise Regained. Shakespeare was greater than Dante or Milton. He was more human. He saw farther. He heard the music of the heavenly spheres even whilst this muddy vesture of decay did grossly close him in. ) X

( 9 )

// To begin with the work of demonstration. *Love's Labour's Lost* is now admitted to have been Shakespeare's earliest play, written during his young years, while he may still be said to have been on probation, still feeling his way. It has been described as motivated by love but love without a trace of passion, almost without deep personal feeling, a love which is half make-belief, tricked out



in word-plays. Charles Knight called it the Comedy of Affectations, and Dowden refers to it as a satirical extravaganza. The play is a protest against the ordering of our lives on an abnormal plan. It is a plea for accepting the world as it is.† “Fantastical speech, pedantic learning, extravagant love-hyperbole”—against these it is aimed. But it has a serious purpose, too, not merely that of satire or fun.

The king declares that Navarre shall be the wonder of the world ;

“ Our court shall be a little academe,  
Still and contemplative in living art.”

Biron, Dumaine and Longaville are to be his company for three years. Their mind shall banquet, though body pine. They swear “not to see ladies, strive not sleep.” In the first scene of the first Act the following which was doubtless calculated to make the audience laugh, and they enjoyed it although the humour is forced : The letter is from Armado as a mint of phrases in his brain and concerns the swain :

“ *King.* Will you hear this with attention?

*Biron.* As we would hear a tale.

*Cost.* Such is the simplicity of man to hearken after the flesh.

*King.* [Reads] ‘Great deputy, the welkin’s vicergerent, and sole dominator of Navarre, my soul’s earth’s God, and body’s fostering patron’—

*Cost.* Not a word of Costard yet.

*King.* ‘So it is.’

*Cost.* It may be so ; but if he say it is so, he is, in telling true, but so,—

*King.* Peace !

*Cost.* —be to me, and every man that dares not fight.



*King.* No words !

*Cost.* —of other men's secrets, I beseech you.

*King.* ' So it is, besieged with sable-coloured melancholy, I did commend the black-oppressing humour to the most wholesome physic of thy health-giving air ; and, as I am a gentleman, betook myself to walk. The time when? About the sixth hour ; when beasts most graze, birds best peck, and men sit down to that nourishment which is called supper. So much for the time when. Now for the ground which ; which, I mean, I walked upon : it is ycleped thy park. Then for the place where ; where, I mean, I did encounter that obscene and most preposterous event, that draweth from my snow-white pen, the ebon-coloured ink, which here thou viewest, beholdest, surveyest, or seest. But to the place where ;—it standeth north-north-east and by east from the west corner of thy curious-knotted garden ; there did I see that low-spirited swain, that base minnow of thy mirth '—

*Cost.* Me.

*King.* —' that unletter'd small-knowing soul,'—

*Cost.* Me.

*King.* " That shallow vessel,'—

*Cost.* Still me.

*King.* ' which, as I remember, hight Costard,'—

*Cost.* O ! me.

*King.* —' sorted and consorted, contrary to thy established proclaimed edict and continent canon, with—  
—with—O ! with—but with this I passion to say wherewith.'—

*Cost.* With a wench.

*King.* —' with a child of our grandmother Eve, a female ; or, for thy more sweet understanding, a



woman. Him I (as my ever-esteemed duty pricks me on) have sent to thee, to receive the meed of punishment, by thy sweet grace's officer, Antony Dull, a man of good repute, carriage, bearing and estimation.' "

The laugh is against the stilted and pompous style of the letter and Costard's foolery is hardly different from that of the traditional clown. We have a direct attack on the euphuistic style in Biron's words in the fifth act :

" Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,  
Three-piled hyperboles, spruce affectation,  
Figures pedantical ; these summer-flies  
Have blown me full of maggot ostentation  
I do forswear them ; and I here protest  
By this white glove,—how white the ha—

Henceforth my wooing mind shall be less'd  
In russet yeas and honest Kears

But laughter is not the sole aim of comedy. Even so early the dramatist is serious. Tell us how silly it is to deviate from the well-path and how dangerous to be extravagant. exuberance and light-heartedness are all very well, they must not be allowed to do duty for prudence. Facts must be faced. And the cardinal fact is that we are men with the feelings and desires of men and not intellectual automata. A life devoted to pure idealism leads to ridicule, mockery, pain, even disaster. There is fun in most of the scenes, as when Armado and Moth talk about sadness and melancholy. There is fun when the King, and Biron, and Dumaine and Longaville are all found to have broken their vow, and Biron truly comments :

" Sweet lords, sweet lovers, O ! let us embrace.



As true we are as flesh and blood can be :  
 The sea will ebb and flow, heaven show his face ;  
 Young blood doth not obey an old decree."

There is joyous conviction in the young poet's enthusiasm for love :

" For valour, is not Love a Hercules,  
 Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?  
 Subtle as Sphinx ; as sweet and musical  
 As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair ;  
 And, when love speaks, the voice of all the gods  
 Make heaven drowsy with the harmony.  
 Never durst poet touch a pen to write,  
 Until his ink were temper'd with love's sighs ;  
     ! then his lines would ravage savage ears,  
     plant in tyrants mild humility.  
 From women's eyes this doctrine I derive :  
 They sparkle still the right Promethean fire ;  
 They light the books, the arts, the academes,  
 That show, contain, and nourish all the world."

✓ There is fun when Holofernes smells false Latin, and Boyet is stabb'd with laughter. ✱ Just when merriment and good spirits and fun are at their highest, enters Monsieur Mercade, a messenger.

" *Mer.* God save you, madam.

*Prin.* Welcome, Mercade,

But that thou interrupt'st our merriment.

*Mer.* I am sorry, madam ; for the news I bring is .  
 heavy in my tongue—The king your father—

*Prin.* Dead, for my life !

*Mer.* Even so ; my tale is told.

*Biron.* Worthies, away ! The scene begins to cloud."

Yes, the scene begins to cloud, as it is bound to in actual



life. Life is no more a secure place for austere self-development than for pure mirth and laughter. Sadness cannot be banished. The Princess is to shut her woful self up in a mourning house, raining the tears of lamentation for the remembrance of her father's death. The king is to go with speed to some forlorn and naked hermitage. This, however, is not how matters will end. Pain is not our ultimate portion. Grief and separation and mourning will demand their share, but they will not, cannot have the whole of us. The Princess promises by her virgin palm, at the expiration of a year, to be his. With this prospect we have to be content. One day, not far off without doubt, Ver will assert supremacy and all shepherds will pipe and merry larks and cuckoos will sing. But lest we grow careless and secure, we must realise that later on icicles will hang by the wall and blood will be nipped and Marian's nose will look red and raw. Not very consoling? But the dramatist held the mirror up to nature.

( 10 )

✓ *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy the chief interest of which lies in its "Instead of reasonable inducements," says Gerv., "instead of natural impulses flowing from character and circumstance, caprice is master here." Verplanck explains why the play is to be regarded as a lyrical comedy: "Its transitions are as rapid, and the images and scenes it presents to the imagination as unexpected and as remote from each other, as those of the boldest lyric; while it has also that highest perfection of the lyric art, the pervading unity of the poetic spirit,—that continued glow of excited thought—which blends the whole rich and strange variety in one common effect of gay and dazzling brilliancy." Brandes describes



it as "a lightly flowing, sportive, lyrical fantasy, dealing with love as a dream, a fever, an illusion, an infatuation, and making merry, in especial, with the irrational nature of the instinct." Dowden speaks of it as a mask of shadows full of marvel, surprises, splendour and grotesqueness.

Carefully looked at, this play is the most typical of Shakespeare's genius. He is here the kindly spectator, wise above others, overseeing the blundering acts of men, and commenting on them with a smile of understanding on his face. He sees all types and all classes. Puck may exclaim complacently, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!" but even the fairies are fools and make silly blunders as easily as men themselves. Theseus and Hippolyta, Oberon, Titania and Puck, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Quince and Snug and Bottom, even Mustardseed and Peasblossom—all pass beneath the commentator's gaze, and as each set comes, he smiles at them, hints at possible peril to them, and dismisses them with his benediction.

As in many plays, the opening lines strike the keynote of the comedy.

"O, methinks, he  
This old moon waxes!"

It is this irrational haste that characterises even Theseus: he is the most enlightened of them all, but even he is impatient. But then all love is irrational: it is pure instinct, and has no foundation in reason. This was a frequent problem with him:

"Tell me where is fancy bred,  
Or in the heart or in the head,"

is a question in the *Merchant of Venice*. The feeling of fancy, *The Twelfth Night* Duke says, is giddy and unfirm,



longing, wavering, soon lost and <sup>won</sup>won. It is this fancy of which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* makes fun. ✓ The play is a genial criticism of fancy which cool reason never comprehends. † Once attacked by it, every person makes a fool of himself. This is the first *motif* of the comedy. The tangle which makes the situation interesting is also caused by this feeling of love. Both Lysander and Demetrius 'fancy' Hermia, though she has expressed her determination to wed Lysander. Nedar's daughter, Helena, meanwhile, sweet lady,

“dotes,

Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry ”

upon Demetrius. But it is not only these Athenian men and maidens that are in the grip of fancy. The fairy king and queen have fallen out with each other. Oberon suspects Titania of having a soft corner in her heart for Theseus ; Titania thinks Oberon loves Hippolyta. We enter into the spirit of the play and laugh at the fairy queen's folly in loving Bottom ; we laugh at Lysander for falling in love with Helena ; we laugh at Hermia when she runs forlorn without any lover, though a few minutes earlier she had two at her feet. It is the antics that love plays at their expense that excite our laughter.

Then we laugh at the crude simplicity of the dramatic representation arranged by the Athenian artisans, and the great figure among them is of course Bottom to whom we shall revert later. The dramatist wants us to laugh good-humouredly at them and through them at the early stage conditions. They put up “the most lamentable comedy and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby,” just like “a lamentable tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth ” dealing with Cambyzes. Even this play deals with ‘a lover that kills himself most gallant for love’—in



other words, makes an ass of himself. Flute, who is now about twenty, and a little ashamed any longer to take a woman's part, protests :

“ Nay, faith, let me not play a woman ;  
I have a beard coming ” ;

but the tyrannical stage-manager, Quince, can't take a refusal :

“ That's all one. You shall play it in a mask,  
and you may speak as small as you will.”

All this is calculated to make us laugh.

In all this, it may be asked, where is any hint of seriousness? Even in this dream-world the shadow of pain falls and the thought that at any moment disaster may happen is never absent. In the very first scene Egeus demands of the Duke his privilege according to the law of Solon to force Hermia to marry Demetrius, failing which he is determined to put her to death. Theseus modifies this threat ; but even after this leniency, the two alternatives are marriage with Demetrius, and :

“ You can endure the livery of a nun ;  
For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,  
To live a barren sister all your life,  
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.”

The background is thus made sinister and the possibility of tragedy is suggested at the very start. When the others leave only Lysander and Hermia on the stage, he notices that her cheek is pale and he opines that the course of true love never did run smooth. This prepares us for obstacles. There may be difficulties and even failure. There is an edict in destiny that true lovers must ever be crossed. There is a hint of trouble again as Helena



decides to reveal to Demetrius the secret of Hermia's flight seven leagues remote from Athens. [When the fairies make their appearance, trouble is not absent :

“ The king doth keep his revels here tonight ;  
Take heed the queen come not within his sight ;  
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath.”

Oberon's first words to Titania are :

“ Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.”

She replies :

“ What, jealous Oberon ! Fairies, skip hence ;  
I have foresworn his bed and company.”

And they quarrel very much as mortal husband and wife do. This disagreement between them has led to serious consequences :

“ Therefore, the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea  
Contagious fogs, which, falling in the land,  
Hath every pelting river made so proud,  
That they have overborne their continents ; . . .  
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,  
That rheumatic diseases do abound ;  
And through this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter : hoaryheaded frosts  
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose ;  
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown  
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
The childing autumn, angry winter, change  
Their wonted liveries ; and the mazed world,  
By their increase, now knows not which is which.”



Surely this is tragic atmosphere, this is tragic background. Such is the background in the tragedy of *Julius Caesar*. where Casca says :

“ But never till to-night, never till now,  
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven ;  
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,  
Incenses them to send destruction.”

It is not without significance that these unnatural happenings figure both in tragedy and comedy.

When Titania calls for a roundel and a fairy song, she is in her element and commands her fairies to their respective duties. They sing a lullaby and ask Philomel to sing : but even they are conscious of the forces of evil :

“ Weaving spiders, come not here ;  
Hence, you long-legg'd spinners, hence !  
Beetles black, approach not near ;  
Worm nor snail, do no offence.”

There is again the shadow of tragedy when Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius and pours the charm into his eyes. The lines that Puck utters when rebuked by Oberon for this blunder are important from our present point of view :

“ Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding  
troth,  
A million fail, confounding oath on oath.”

It is, to say the least, curious that the over-ruling power of fate should be emphasised in a comedy by the arch-comedian of the fairies, the merry wanderer of the night, the shrewd and knavish sprite, Robin Goodfellow, Hobgoblin, and sweet Puck.



There is again the hint of tragedy when Lysander and Demetrius prepare to fight, thus yielding pleasure to Puck who says to his master:

“ And so far am I glad it so did sort,  
As this their jangling I esteem a sport.”

In the fourth act, tragedy just makes an appearance when Egeus says :

“ Enough, enough, my lord ; you have enough ;  
I beg the law, the law upon his head ” ;

But it is only for a moment, and the country proverb is fulfilled that Jack shall have Jill, and all shall be well. The fairies sing a ditty and dance trippingly and bless the place.

A word must be said of sweet Bully Bottom. Puck calls him the shallowest thick-skin of that barren sort. And yet, Falstaff excepted, more has been written on him than on any other character in the comedies. Hazlitt calls him the most romantic of mechanics. Charles Knight calls him the representative of the whole human race. Dowden waxes eloquent in his praise—“ Bottom is,” he says, “ incomparably a finer efflorescence of the absurd than any preceding character of Shakespeare’s invention.” Mr. Priestley (who thinks that Bottom has, somewhere in the background, a shrewish wife !) says :

“ Which of us has not visited some rural tap-room, and found there, wedged in a corner, a large, round-faced, wide-mouthed fellow, the local oracle ; and, having listened to some of his pronouncements, have laughed in our sleeves at his ignorance, dogmatism, and conceit ; and yet, after staying a little longer and staring at the creature’s large, solemn face, a face perilously



close to vacuity, have noticed in it certain momentary twinkles and creases that have suddenly left us a little dubious about our hasty conclusions? And then it has dawned upon us that the fellow is, in his own way, which is not ours nor one to which we are accustomed, a humorist, and that somewhere behind that immobile and almost vacuous front, he has been enjoying us, laughing at us, just as we have been enjoying him and laughing at him."

✓ Bottom is one of the great comic characters in literature, and yet he is not wholly ludicrous, any more than Falstaff is. He represents the highest achievement of self-assurance and self-confidence. ✱ And what is remarkable, those that know him best think most highly of him. The man who can survive the contempt born of familiarity must have real greatness in him. ✓ Then, too, his is a dominating personality. He can never be content to play the second fiddle. When he is present, all look up to him. In his own circle he is first without a second ; in his own sphere he shines resplendent ; in his work he acknowledges no master. ✱ That this man, of all the russet-pated choughs, should have been selected for Puck's practical foolery, is a little unfair. He has deserved better. But when the fairy queen dotes on him he is neither daunted nor surprised. The love of the fairy he accepts very much as if he has all his life been used to it. He orders the fairies about their work as if to the manner born. When he is in the presence of the Duke, he is not overawed at all. He is the supreme embodiment of *sang-froid*. ✓ He is practical, but he is also a dreamer. He sees visions and is thereby lifted above others, and thus becomes an impressive figure. ✱

Nominally Peter Quince is the manager, but Bottom



takes the management into his own hands. He is the star actor and knows he can afford to lay down the law. His part has been well-chosen. He is to play the lover that kills himself for love. He is a gallant and knows how to play the part to perfection—

“ That will ask some tears in the true performing of it : if I do it, let the audience look to their eyes ; I will move storms, I will condole in some measure.”

Lest it be thought he can play the lover's part only, he hastens to say :

“ Yet my chief humour is for a tyrant : I could play Ercles rarely, or a part to tear a cat in, to make all split.”

But his gifts are varied. “ An I may hide my face, let me play Thisby too. I'll speak in a monstrous little voice : ‘ Thisne, Thisne ’ ; “ Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear! thy Thisby dear, and lady dear! ” A little later he offers to play the lion too and to roar that even the duke will say, ‘ Let him roar again, let him roar again.’ But Quince is alarmed. Bottom and none else can play the hero :

“ You can play no part but Pyramus ; for Pyramus is a sweet-faced man ; a proper man, as one shall see in a summer's day ; a most lovely, gentleman-like man ; therefore you must needs play Pyramus.”

When they reassemble next, Bottom is not merely an actor but a critic. He finds fault with the play :

“ There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisby, that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself, which the ladies cannot abide.”



Then he utters words of wisdom recommending to the audience the use of their own imagination for the production of verisimilitude. Like the Prologue to *Henry V*, Bottom would ask the spectators to picture the scene in their minds' eye :

“ I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue.”

He is easily the master-mind among them.

Then a supernatural being plays a sad trick on him by putting an ass' head on him. As if that were not misfortune enough, he is present when Titania opens her eyes and she is infatuated with him. A lesser man than he would be bewildered. But he has learnt to accept life as it comes. He is for acquiring all experience and he never loses his head. Does Titania ask him to sing? Is her ear much enamour'd of his note, and her eye enthralled to his shape? Well, very well. The years have brought him the philosophic mind :

“ Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that : and yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays ; the more the pity, that some honest neighbours will not make them friends.”

He will not lose his head. The queen assures him that he is as wise as he is beautiful. But he is not so vain as to take it all in as true :

“ Not so, neither ; but if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve mine own turn.”

He will not, however, refuse the homage of Peaseblossom and the rest. He desires their better acquaintance, and



commands one to scratch his head, a second to kill him a red-hipped humble-bee and bring him the honey-bag. But soon he says to the Queen :

“ I pray you, let none of your people stir me ; I have an exposition of sleep come on me.”

And she embraces him as the female ivy enrings the barky fingers of the elm.

This is the climax of his good luck. For the spell is removed, and the Queen joins Oberon and forgets the mortal of whom for a while she was enamoured. But not so the mortal. In a vision, in a dream, but even so, he has been loved by a queen ; he has, in his dream, ordered fairies about ; he has been equal with the immortals.

“ I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was : man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.”

Meanwhile, his comrades are at sea without him. They have no notion of his great adventure. If he come not, then the play is marred, says Flute. It is not possible, decides Quince ; you have not a man in all Athens able to discharge Pyramus but he. He has the best wit and the best person, and ‘ he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.’ So great indeed is their regret that he has lost sixpence a day during his life ; he could not have ’scaped sixpence



a day. Bottom returns and their spirits are revived and he promises them that he is to discourse wonders. He is richer for his dream; he is to be a different man ever after. He is refined :

“ In any case let Thisby have clean linen. And, most dear actors, eat no onions, nor garlic, for we are to utter sweet breath.”

He has achieved happiness in his vision ; he has acquired experience and peace and confidence. If others yet laugh at him, let them. He will live after the laughers are dead, for is it not said those that have no vision perish?

( 11 )

✓ *The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy of the middle period. ✕

“ In sooth, I know not why I am so sad ”—surely, an extraordinary speech to begin a comedy with. But here, too, the eternal note of sadness persists to the end. Indeed, Shylock is essentially a tragic figure. The first words of Portia express sadness too :

“ By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.”

When Bassanio asks Shylock to dine with him the Jew's reply indicates the possibility of tragedy :

“ Yes, to small <sup>earn</sup>pork; to eat of the habitation which your prophet, the Nazarite, conjured the devil into; I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following ; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you.”

The sight of Antonio too makes Shylock lose his equani-



mity and he says in an aside which is enough to hint at a future tragedy :

“ How like a fawning publican he looks !  
I hate him for he is a Christian ;  
But more for that, in low simplicity,  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.  
He hates our sacred nation ; and he rails,  
Even there where merchants most do congregate,  
On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift,  
Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe  
If I forgive him ! ”

But it is not the Jew alone who expresses these uncharitable sentiments. Antonio intensifies the tragic suggestion :

“ I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.”

Apart from this, the overhanging sense of gloom is suggested again and again. Salarino describes the following scene :

“ I saw Bassanio and Antonio part :  
Bassanio told him he would make some speed  
Of his return : he answer'd—‘ Do not so ;  
Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio ;  
But stay the very riping of the time ;  
And for the Jew’s bond which he hath of me,  
Let it not enter in your mind of love ;  
Be merry ; and employ your chiefest thoughts  
To courtship, and such fair ostents of love  
As shall conveniently become you there.’



And even there, his eye being big with tears,  
Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,  
And with affection wondrous sensible  
He wrung Bassanio's hand ; and so they parted."

Antonio's ships have been wrecked, and Salarino expresses the hope that if he forfeit Shylock will not take his flesh ; but the Jew forthwith replies :

" If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and hindered me of half a million ; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason? I am a Jew ! Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.—If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute ; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

This is not only the underdog's assertion of his inalienable rights of manhood, but also an indication of the coming tragedy.

In the midst of the rejoicings at Belmont Bassanio receives a letter the shrewd contents of which steal the



colour from his cheeks, and every word in which is a gaping wound, issuing life-blood. A moment earlier Portia had been happy that she was not so old but she might learn, happier that she was not bred so dull but she could learn, and happiest that her gentle spirit committed itself to Bassanio's to be directed as from her lord, her governor, her king. Bassanio had been giddy in spirit. But now he has to despatch all business and quickly depart from Belmont. The tragedy thickens. Antonio realises that the duke cannot deny the course of law and thereby impeach the justice of the state. More and more close we get to the bounds of tragedy until we are in its very presence in the trial-scene. The Duke describes the Jew as a stony adversary and an inhuman wretch : but though we may partly agree with him, we see too that the Jew has for the time being the upper hand. Antonio is arm'd—very much in the style of the heroes of classical tragedy—to suffer, with a quietness of spirit, the very tyranny and rage of the Jew. Not all the appeals of the Duke move Shylock, and the sad part of the business is that we recognise he has just cause for obstinacy. The worm has turned and some sympathy cannot be withheld from it. A good deal of wrangling ensues while the hand of tragedy is on Antonio. In the accents employed by Hamlet to Horatio :

“ In this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
To tell my story,”

Antonio addresses Bassanio :

“ You cannot better be employ'd, Bassanio,  
Than to live still, and write mine epitaph.”

When Portia addresses to the Jew her magnificent appeal for mercy and fails, the suspense is painful. We had been



promised a comedy. Is this the dramatist's notion of comedy? Antonio's farewell :

“ Tell her the process of Antonio's end ;  
Say how I lov'd you ; speak me fair in death ”—

is in the very key of tragedy. Thrice Portia awards the Jew a pound of flesh and we prepare and shudder to see Antonio butchered on the stage. We can hardly bear to look on ; we shield our eyes from the horrid hent. Then the dramatist uses a master-stroke and by a word lifts the sceptred pall of tragedy, and light comes again, and the load falls from our hearts and our sense of right is re-established. Nowhere else does Shakespeare bring tragedy and comedy so near together ; nowhere else does he demonstrate the very thin line that there is between the two. The issue hangs by a thread, and we marvel at the good luck that saves Antonio, and we are a little frightened also. That our fate can be determined by what is so slight and inconsiderable is a thought that alarms us. But lest our minds should get absorbed in these high matters, the poet rushes us through one pleasant surprise to another, for is he not writing a comedy? With the departure of Shylock and his broken words :

“ I pray you, give me leave to go from hence ; I  
am not well ; send the deed after me and I will  
sign it ”—

the last trace of tragedy is effaced.

So much space has been devoted to the tragic element in the play because of the importance of the *Merchant of Venice* in the development of Shakespeare's art. What Shakespeare laughs at in this is first the affectation of melancholy—a subject which he will deal with



more fully in another play. Gratiano makes fun of this :

“ Why should a man, whose blood is warm within,  
Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster? . . . .  
I’ll tell thee more of this another time :  
But fish not, with this melancholy bait,  
For this fool’s gudgeon, this opinion.”

Nerissa too laughs at Portia’s melancholy. Then we are to laugh at the pure innocent foolery of Launcelot at the expense of his old father, in the old manner suggestive of horseplay.

“ *Gobbo.* Master, young man, you, I pray you,  
which is the way to master Jew’s?

*Laun.* [Aside]. O heavens, this is my true  
begotten father! who, being more than  
sand-blind, high-gravel blind, knows me  
not! I will try confusions with him.

*Gobbo.* Master young gentleman, I pray you,  
which is the way to master Jew’s?

*Laun.*—Turn up on your right hand at the next  
turning, but, at the next turning of all,  
on your left; marry, at the very next  
turning, turn of no hand, but turn  
down indirectly to the Jew’s house.”

Launcelot is the great humorist of the play. He alarms poor Jessica.

“ *Laun.* Yes, truly;—for, look you, the sins of the  
father are to be laid upon the children ;  
therefore. I promise you, I fear you. I  
was always plain with you, and so now  
I speak my agitation of the matter :



therefore, be of good cheer; for, truly,  
I think you are damned."

The final source of merriment is the tangle caused by the gift of the rings by Bassanio and Gratiano. Altogether, then, the play is a comedy only because it ends happily for the principal characters and not because the pervading atmosphere is light and pleasant. Shakespeare cannot forget the sadness of things. Shylock is punished, Antonio is saved, Portia is triumphant. Good has succeeded, evil has failed. Our sense of morality is satisfied—even at the expenditure of much credulity. But the poet will give us one last Act more, one in which he will let himself go, be himself, get away from the trammels imposed by the plot. He will provide us with pure poetry dealing with love and joy and moonlight.

"The moon shines bright! In such a night as this,  
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,  
And they did make no noise; in such a night,  
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,  
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,  
Where Cressid lay that night."

The stores of ancient legend are made to contribute and imagination lends life and vividness to these passages. But although it is the talk of lovers who are happily together, the poet cannot banish from it a certain sad note of wistfulness.

"In such a night  
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand  
Upon the wild sea-banks, and wav'd her love  
To come again to Carthage."

To both Lorenzo and Jessica comes the recollection of



this tale of sorrow. When music is played to draw Portia to her home, Jessica says :

“ I am never merry when I hear sweet music,”  
and Shakespeare realises that the music of humanity is sad, even though it be sweet. ✕

( 12 )

( Mr. Stopford Brooke says, referring to *As You Like It*, “ We have got back, out of the tragic and semi-tragic world in which we have been, to Shakespeare’s full and delightful gaiety, to the very root of his nature.” Mr. F. A. Marshall expresses himself thus : “ We are out in the open air ; we hear the wind rustling in the fragrant leaves of the fairy-land of Arden ; and we are far too lazy and too genially contented to think of purposes, and leading ideas, and things philosophic.” “ We have here,” says a continental scholar, “ no attempt at a reproduction of reality, but one long festival of gaiety and wit, a soulful wit that vibrates into feeling.” He calls the play a festival of wit. Dowden goes into lyric raptures over it :  
✓ “ It is the sweetest and happiest of all Shakespeare’s comedies. It is mirthful, but the mirth is sprightly, graceful, exquisite. ✕ Shakespeare sends his imagination into the woods to find repose. There is an open-air feeling throughout the play. Here he needed refreshment, a sunlight tempered by forest-boughs, a breeze upon his forehead, a stream murmuring in his ears.”

In spite of this impressive unanimity, I maintain that to a certain extent Shakespeare keeps to his well-thought philosophy of life in this comedy too. Of its serious aspect an account will be given a little later. It may be conceded that there is more of *abandon* and light-heartedness in this play than in most of the others. Shakespeare does seem to be feverishly eager for mirth. He intends



to laugh at love, at melancholy, at courtiers, at everything that is serious and important. He proposes to adopt an attitude of carelessness and jollity. Whether Shakespeare himself was subject to melancholy is a question that need not detain us here.) In the *Merchant of Venice* he had touched on the subject in the person of Antonio. An aggravated, even tragic figure of melancholy he is to present in *Hamlet*. (Meanwhile he proposes to laugh at it. Jaques is a priceless possession. He is the melancholy critic. He is for all waters and has the right stuff in him. He has been through many experiences, and desires to add more to them. He possesses a store of maxims which he is eager to apply. He can find matter for thought in the merest trifles. He represents the type with which we are not wholly unfamiliar, the grumbler, the man whom nothing pleases, who will "most invectively pierce through the body of the country, city, court, yea, of this our life." Yet he is not a fool. If melancholy pleases him, what harm? Others do not take him seriously : he is just a cynic taking stock of the world and making comments on what he sees. Nor is he quite devoid of kindly sentiments : he can waste pity on the poor deer who has been abandon'd of his velvet friends. When we are first told about him, the Lords have left him weeping. The Duke knows that in these sullen fits he is full of matter. We discover him in a part of the forest, listening eagerly to Amien's song :

" Under the greenwood tree,  
Who loves to lie with me,  
And tune his merry note  
Unto the sweet bird's throat,

Come hither, come hither, come hither ;  
Here shall he see



No enemy

But winter and rough weather."

He wants more of it. He thanks it. His muse is inspired to recite a verse to this note that he made in despite of his invention. He encounters Touchstone and the battle of wits between the two must have been a rare sight. But when he relates the meeting to the Duke he is in excellent humour ; his sides are splitting with laughter ; he thinks he has discovered an admirable butt for ridicule, and he talks condescendingly of Touchstone :

" A fool, a fool !—I met a fool i' the forest,  
A motley fool." . . . . .  
When I did hear  
The motley fool thus moral on the time,  
My lungs began to crow like chanticleer,  
That fools should be so deep contemplative ;  
And I did laugh, sans intermission,  
An hour by his dial—O noble fool !  
A worthy fool !—motley's the only wear."

But he realises the advantages of being a fool. If he could only be invested in motley himself he would go through the infected world and cleanse its foul body. Hudson and Grant White are inclined to regard Jaques as a fool : but it is into his mouth that the poet prefers to put this passage :

" All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players ;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages."

He may have been disillusioned, but his cynicism is all on the surface. His life has been a hard one. In kinder



circumstances he might have blossomed out into the exponent of a cheerful and genial philosophy. But even as it is he longs for the warmth of the presence of youth and grace and loveliness. He says to Rosalind—he, the melancholy Jaques :—

“ I prithee, pretty youth, let me be better acquainted with thee.”

He is very learned when he talks of his melancholy—

“ I have neither the scholar’s melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician’s, which is fantastical; nor the courtier’s, which is proud; nor the soldier’s, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer’s which is politic; nor the lady’s which is nice; nor the lover’s which is all these; but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects; and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.”

This man feels abashed and seeks to run away when another makes fun of him. When Rosalind says to him in her exuberance produced by the arrival of Orlando that he should lisp and wear strange suits, and disable all the benefits of his own country, he quietly slips away. When he brings Touchstone to the Duke he exhibits him with pride, draws him out and takes visible delight in his talk. He appeals to the Duke :

“ Good my lord, like this fellow,”

and says later :

“ Is not this a rare fellow, my lord? he’s as good at anything, and yet a fool.”



Of all the characters in this play he alone retains his critic detachment to the end ; he alone does not prove himself to be inconsistent. He is for acquiring experience ; he will go to the usurper duke :

“ To him will I ; out of these convertites  
There is much matter to be heard and learn’d.”

But before he goes he will prove that even though personally he is for other than dancing measures, he is generous enough to wish love and joy to the others, his former honour to the Duke, and good fortune to Orlando, Oliver and Silvius. We may laugh at his melancholy and perhaps Shakespeare’s audience did laugh. But we have a suspicion that he is essentially wiser than the rest.

Touchstone is frankly intended to be laughed at. He is described by the Second Lord to Duke Frederick as :

“ The roynish clown, at whom so oft  
Your grace was wont to laugh ” ;

Jaques assures the Duke Senior that Touchstone is “ a motley fool,” “ a noble fool, a worthy fool,” and that his brain “ is as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage.” But he is not only a fool. Here, too, the poet will give to his creation many redeeming features. He is not a mere fool : Touchstone expresses his regret that fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly. He is the critic in motley, as Jaques is the melancholy critic. The two may indeed be regarded as parallel types, each setting off the characteristics of the other. Touchstone is certainly the more likeable, though Jaques is the more experienced. The former is a good friend and has warm human feelings. The latter, we fear, may end in becoming an Iago. Rosalind thinks he will be a comfort to



their travel. And Celia, knowing the true metal she has in him, replies :

“ He’ll go along o’er the wide world with me ;  
Leave me alone to woo him.”

He will always be surly and will grumble and complain :

“ Ay, now am I in Arden : the more fool I ; when  
I was at home I was in a better place ; but  
travellers must be content.”

And he is content, for even though his legs are weary, he can laugh at love and lovers, little realising that the irony of events will soon take him too to their fold. He can expound deep philosophy to Corin, the eternal dissatisfaction of man and the value of contentment :

“ In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well ;  
but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile  
life.”

Soon he is one of the true lovers and he runs strange capers. He will fetch up Audrey’s goats : he is eager that his simple feature should content her. Even then he does not cease to be wise : ‘ the truest poetry is the most feigning,’ he says. Nor does he cease to be a philosopher : “ Courage ! As horns are odious, they are necessary.” He can meet Jaques on a footing of equality ; he does not fear the melancholy man. By his troth, he and others like him that have good wits have much to answer for ; they will be flouting ; they cannot hold. He makes poor William run away and is himself awaiting with composure, perhaps with pleasure, the wedding day—“ Tomorrow is the joyful day, Audrey.” In the last Act, he comes amongst the rest of the country copulatives, to swear and to forswear, according as marriage binds and blood



breaks. Then he introduces his Audrey with becoming pride :

“ A poor virgin, sir, an ill-favoured thing, but mine own ; a poor humour of mine, sir, to take that that no man else will ; rich honesty dwells like a miser, sir, in a poorhouse ; as your pearl in your foul oyster.”

*As You Like It* has been described by Mr. Masefield as a play that treats of the gifts of Nature and the ways of Fortune. But it is much more than that. It is, of course, in accord with the Shakespearean formula of two or more lovers being happily united in the end. It is, if we like, a satire on melancholy and on love. But it is in essence, a kindly commentary on life—entirely in keeping with the view we have been attempting to demonstrate, that life is a pleasant affair with a dark and sinister background. There is always a menace : it is there : we are lucky if it does not spring upon us, but it is well to be prepared for it. As in the *Merchant of Venice*, so in this play the atmosphere in the beginning is sombre, not to say sad. The first words are those of the hero,

“ As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion, —bequeathed me by will but poor a thousand crowns, and, as thou sayst, charged my brother, on his blessing, to breed me well : and there begins my sadness.”

The quarrel between the two brothers in the first scene casts a shadow on our spirits and we arm ourselves for unpleasant developments. The sense of gloom is deepened by the first words of Celia and Rosalind :

“ *Cel.* I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry.



*Ros.* Dear Celia, I show more mirth than I am mistress of ; and would you yet I were merrier? Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure."

On all sides there is tragedy, or at least the atmosphere of tragedy. Old Adam says to Orlando :

" O unhappy youth,

Come not within these doors ; within this roof  
The enemy of all your graces lives."

He warns him that Oliver means to burn his lodging, and that if he fail of that he will have recourse to other practices. We are brought face to face with the malice of a diverted blood. But lest we should hasten to form a dark view of human nature, we are immediately acquainted with the constant service of the antique world, for Adam assures Orlando :

" I will follow thee

To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty."

There is a slight element of seriousness in the scorn of Phebe for Silvius. There is tragedy next, in the fourth Act, when Oliver comes to meet Rosalind and Celia and gives the bloody napkin to the former who faints on hearing of the incident of the lioness. The green and gilded snake and the lioness with udders all drawn dry are symbols of our disasters. Even in the forest of Arden, where the world seems to be in eternal sunshine, and laughter and mirth reign supreme, and no harsh sound from court life can come, even there dangers lurk and disasters threaten. All ends happily, it is true. Everyone falls into a rustic revelry. But it is well to be reminded that though things have happened luckily in the manner in which they have, they could have taken a different and very unpleasant turn indeed. )



*The Twelfth Night* is one of those romantic plays in ✓  
which pleasure alternates with pain, and although there is  
an abundance of mirth, there is much of sorrow also. There  
is a peculiar fragrance about this play. The forest of Arden  
 was delightful in its own way : but it was far from the  
 haunts of men. It was a scene of happiness, because people  
 dwelt in it free from the cramping atmosphere of the Court.  
 There was love and moonlight in Belmont, but it was with-  
 in easy reach of Venice and of Shylock. Illyria is, however,  
 a place entirely imaginary, and yet there are in it the normal  
 occupations of men and women. There is an atmosphere of  
gentle culture, of poetry and light imaginings, of love and  
courtship, of sentiment and carelessness, and the presiding  
genius of it all is the Duke Orsino who is doubtless the most  
romantic-minded of Shakespeare's heroes. What does the  
 poet intend to make us laugh at in this atmosphere? He  
suggests in the play that it does not do to take life too  
seriously. Life can be a very pleasant business, but we  
 need not regard ourselves or our work as of the slightest  
 moment to the world. We laugh here, accordingly, at  
Olivia ; we laugh at Orsino, at Malvolio, at Sebastian, even  
at Sir Toby. When the play opens we are told of Olivia :

“ The element itself, till seven years' heat,  
 Shall not behold her face at ample view;  
 But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk,  
 And water once a day her chamber round  
 With eye-offending brine: all this to season  
 A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh  
 And lasting in her sad remembrance.”



Not many days later, as soon as she sees the disguised Viola, she forgets her vow, and she murmurs:

“Ourselves we do not owe:

What is decreed must be: and be this so!”

She is head over heels in love.—She assures Cesario:

“But would you undertake another suit,  
I had rather hear you to solicit that  
Than music from the spheres.”

She forgets her maidenly modesty so far as to say:

“Cesario, by the roses of the spring,  
By maidhood, honour, truth, and everything,  
I love thee so that, maugre all thy pride,  
Nor wit, nor reason, can my passion hide.”

But in spite of all this violent passion, she at last marries Sebastian.

We laugh at the Duke Orsino. He is discovered to us first in a melancholy mood, brooding on his love, delighting in its thought and taking a melancholy pleasure in talking of it:

“If music be the food of love, play on,  
Give me excess of it; that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.—  
That strain again:—it had a dying fall;  
O, it came o’er my ear like the sweet south,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing, and giving odour.”

He declares that

“Liver, brain, and heart,  
These sov’reign thrones, are all supplied  
and fill’d,—  
Her sweet perfections,—with one self king!”



His love is all as hungry as the sea. When the countess Olivia comes in his presence, he thinks heaven walks on earth. Yet soon he decides to have "a share in this most happy wreck," and offers his hand to Viola saying she shall be her master's mistress. We laugh at the speed with which all his love for Olivia has vanished.

We laugh at Sebastian for the manner in which he is stampeded into marriage with a woman he had never seen before. But, above all, we laugh at Malvolio. Here also we laugh at love and at a peculiar manifestation of it in self-love. He attaches too much importance to himself, and we laugh at his pomposity and virtuosity. Olivia analyses him shrewdly when she says :

"O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distemper'd appetite. To be generous, guiltless, and of free disposition, is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets."

He is forever asserting his position as Steward to the Countess. He says to Sir Toby :

"I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you that though she harbours you as her kinsman she's nothing allied to your disorders."

Then to Maria :

"Mistress Mary, if you prized my lady's favour at anything more than contempt, you would not give means for this uncivil rule ; she shall know of it, by this hand."

As, in his humourless fancy, he thinks of his future greatness, he cannot restrain his natural propensity for words of learned length, even though he thinks he is alone :



*Mal.* I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar style with an austere regard of control :

*Sir To.* And does not Toby take you a blow o' the lips then?

*Mal.* Saying, 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes having cast me on your niece, give me this prerogative of speech—'

*Sir To.* What, what?

*Mal.* 'You must amend your drunkenness.'

He is so full of self-love that he explains all Olivia's words to his own satisfaction. And he pays dearly for it. We not only laugh him, but also sympathize with him, for what he suffers is much more serious and severe than he deserves. He complains—hardly realising even now, as perhaps men of his mental cast can never realise what his offence is :

"They have here propertied me ;  
Keep me in darkness, send ministers  
To me, asses, and do all they can  
To face me out of my wits."

To the last he continues to suffer from his chronic malady, for his final words are :

"I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you."

Then there are the professional comic characters in the play, the clown, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew. Feste is a prince among clowns for he observes their mood on whom he jests. Sir Andrew is a stupid but pompous fool. Sir Toby's philosophy is summed up in his words "Care's an enemy to life," though we suspect that in wedding Maria he is laying up a plentiful store of care.

The tragic background is provided for us in several ways. The play opens in a serious atmosphere. The Duke's







hear "that piece of song, that old and antique song we heard last night." He has fallen in love with it :

"Mark it, Cesario ; it is old and plain :  
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun, ✓  
And the free maids, that weave their thread  
with bones, ✓

Do use to chant it : it is silly sooth,  
And dallies with the innocence of love ✓  
Like the old age."

Thus we have the assurance that despite what may happen to a few, life is worth living for the spinsters and the knitters and the free maids. —

( 14 )

In all probability *Cymbeline* is the earliest of the plays after the sombre succession of the tragedies was closed. It ushers in the great romantic period, the period of so-called 'reconciliation.' We shall shortly revert to the tragedies ; meanwhile it is enough to state that this word reconciliation produces an unjust impression of the plays prior to this period. If it implies that for a time the poet was so gloomy and despairing as to be sick of life, to see nothing good or lovely or noble in it, the word is a mistaken one. But if it implies that he had throughout been reconciled to the scheme of things and been satisfied that there was nothing essentially wrong with it, it is correct. In these plays Shakespeare seems fondly to linger over themes and characters in creating which he had in his youth obtained so much pleasure. He is trying to relive those years, to bring back the old sensations. But he cannot, from the very nature of things, recapture the first fine careless rapture : the zest is lacking : it has been replaced by the philosophic mind. But even now he will ✓



not, he need not, abandon the essential basis of his philosophy of life. He had been early impressed with the beauty of life, and its fun and its sadness. He had then his whole life in front of him. Now, in the fading autumn of his days, he cannot obviously summon that enthusiasm ; there is a mellowness in his words, a meditative, melancholy, wistful longing. He is like one, who having passed through it all, pauses to give a word of good cheer to those who are still young and full of hope and energy. He is not a prophet of wrath, he will not discourage the spirit of adventure and endeavour. In his tragedies, Shakespeare suspects, he may have presented pictures that may depress or affright. He had only stressed in them the aspect of horror and ruin without forgetting the second half phase of sweetness and love. But lest superficial persons should run away with a superficial impression, he was now to try to correct that impression. He was to stress—more earnestly, with more self-confidence, in accents of conviction—the intrinsic beauty of life, of human affections, of primal sympathies, of wisdom—without forgetting the presence of treachery and wickedness and folly.

*Cymbeline* was long regarded as a tragedy. But as Hazlitt remarked, the pathos in it is not violent or tragical, but of the most pleasing and amiable kind. Mr. Spencer Baynes describes its atmosphere as one of severe but consolatory calm. We can trace in it the emergence of Shakespeare from the charmed circle of *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*; the tragic gloom is not quite dissipated; indeed, its thick clouds will oppress all the remaining plays. Let us see how it begins. The first words strike the main note. ‘A gentleman’ says :

“ You do not meet a man but frowns : our bloods —  
 No more obey the heavens than our courtiers  
 Still seem as does the king.”



Then he goes on to tell us of the heroine :

“ She’s wedded ;  
Her husband banish’d ; she imprison’d : all  
Is outward sorrow.”

Good people are persecuted : and that is tragic. Posthumus, Imogen, Belarius, all suffer greatly. There are the wicked Queen and the wicked Iachimo. The atmosphere of tragedy is produced by such passages as these: when Imogen says:

“ I false ! Thy conscience witness, Iachimo,  
Thou didst accuse him of incontinency ;  
Thou then look’dst like a villain; now, methinks  
Thy favour’s good enough.—Some jay of Italy,  
Whose mother was her painting, hath

betray’d him:

Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion ;  
And for I am richer than to hang by the walls  
I must be ripp’d ; to pieces with me ! ”

✓ Or when Posthumus raves:

“ Is there no way for men to be, but women  
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards ;  
..... O Vengeance, Vengeance!—  
..... For there’s no motion  
That tends to vice in man but I affirm  
It is the woman’s part : be it lying, note it,  
The woman’s ; flattering, hers ; deceiving, hers ;  
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers ;  
..... revenges, hers ;  
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,  
Nice longing, slanders, mutability,  
All faults that have a name, nay, that hell knows,  
Why, hers, in part or all ; but rather all ;  
For ev’n to vice



They are not constant, but are changing still  
 One vice, but of a minute old, for one  
 Not half so old as that. I'll write against them,  
 Detest them, curse them."

There is tragedy in the battle-scenes that mark the end of the play. Cloten is killed ; the Queen suffers from a madness of which her life's in danger. There is tragedy in the words of Posthumus as he comes on the stage with a handkerchief supposed to be stained with the blood of the murdered Imogen. But all this is on the surface. The actual characters in the play feel the sense of doom, but we the spectators or readers are aware that it is only on the surface. When Posthumus mourns Imogen's death we are not moved by terror. When Imogen is alone in the woods and subject to many perils, our fears are silenced because her brothers receive her and she says :

" Gods, what lies I have heard,  
 Our courtiers say all's savage but at court."

There is tragedy which we feel also, when Arviragus comes, bearing Imogen as dead in his arms. Hardly any trouble remains unremedied by the time the play comes to an end. The spirit underlying it is brought out in the last Act when the ghosts of Posthumus' parents and brothers lament his arrest and accuse Jove of injustice. Then " Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning," and says :

" How dare you ghosts  
 Accuse the thunderer, whose bolt, you know,  
 Sky-planted, batters all rebelling coasts? —  
 Poor shadows of Elysium, hence : and rest  
 Upon your never-withering banks of flowers ;  
 Be not with mortal accidents oppress'd.



Whom best I love I cross ; to make my gift  
The more delay'd, delighted . . . .  
He shall be lord of Lady Imogen,  
And happier much by his affliction made."

Like the Greek plays, this ends with a note of praise to God :

"Laud we the Gods."

In a play so serene and severe, what are we to laugh at? Dowden says : " The sympathetic reader can discern unmistakably a certain remoteness from the usual pleasures and sadnesses of life, and at the same time, all the more, this tender bending over those who are like children still absorbed in their individual joys and sorrows." Perhaps, in an atmosphere such as this, laughter may sound impertinent. But our thesis is that at no period was Shakespeare devoid of the saving gift of laughter. At what then does he laugh in this play and how does he laugh? The most laughable person is Cloten. But he is not a clown ; he is no less important and high-placed a person than son to the Queen. But he is both a coward and a braggart. Nobody likes him ; every one makes fun of him. The first Lord tells him :

" Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt ; the violence of action hath made you reek as a sacrifice : where air comes out air comes in : there's none abroad so wholesome as that you vent."

The second Lord calls him an ass. Imogen addresses him as 'profane fellow :

" His meanest garment,  
That ever hath but clipp'd his body, is dearer  
In my respect than all the hairs above thee  
Were they all made such men."



When Guiderius kills him, he only says :

“ This Cloten was a fool, an empty purse,  
There was no money in't.”

The foolish Cloten dies, but he dies because of his vices and faults. And with him laughter is silenced also. There will be serene smiles and calm and tenderness, but no more laughter.

*The Tempest* is Shakespeare's swan-song. Though it was printed as the first of the plays in the first Folio, there can hardly be any doubt that in it the poet provides us with a retrospect of his dramatic career and prepares himself to leave the scene he had so long adorned. He summons to his side all the creatures he had given birth to, looks them over, approves of them, and then bids them depart with confidence on the road to immortality. Just once more, for a brief while, he will recreate, perhaps for his own satisfaction; once more he will make a King and a Duke and a usurper; honest servants, a much-wronged man, a drunkard ; an airy spirit and a savage and deformed slave ; and just one woman, a young maiden. He will attempt all sorts of experiments,—a shipwreck, magic, a dream-island. After making these and proving that his deft hand has not lost its cunning nor his imagination its creative energy, he ~~will~~ bids farewell to it all. In a play like this, it is important to consider what we can gather of his mature philosophy. What is the philosophy of the *Tempest*? In what wise is it different from that of the early plays or that of the tragedies?

There is not much of a plot ; the events are few ; the dramatic interest is feeble. It certainly is not a comedy of incidents. Nor does it interest us through smart dialogue. The foolery is slight. We are enthralled by its poetry and its dream-like atmosphere. We surrender



ourselves to it willingly ; for the nonce we are content to breathe the same air as Ariel ; we forget the petty concerns of our daily life ; we believe ourselves to dwell on ' an uninhabited island.' A comparison of this play with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is irresistible. In the earlier play love is rampant : the love of the young, the love of the fairies, of the duke, of the Athenian nobles. There youth is ranged against age. Hermia rebels against Egeus. Here in the *Tempest* the play does not begin with love ; and even as it proceeds there is only one pair of lovers. But all the attention and care that the poet had bestowed, about fifteen years earlier, on Theseus and Hippolyta, Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius, Oberon and Titania, he heaps now on just two, Ferdinand and Miranda : all the stages of love, unconscious, unreasoning attraction, the doubts, the certainty, the joy of fruition are depicted with the assurance of a master. Both the earlier and the later plays bring in supernatural beings ; playful and powerful in the former, under the wise man's control in the latter. The scene of the former is laid in a forest ' remote seven leagues ; ' in the latter we are transported to a magic island. There is in both the same abundance of poetic thought. But while in the earlier play the underlying thought is " Lord, what fools these mortals be ! " in the later one, Miranda says her imagination cannot form any shape like Ferdinand's ;

" I might call him  
A thing divine."

Ariel takes the place of Puck. But there is no mischief. There is wickedness, instead—the wickedness of Caliban. But over both the faithful and the perfidious, the pure and the sordid, the bright and the dull, the mind of man has power. Prospero can control them both, and so can attain



to peace and happiness. His is not the giddy pleasure of youth. Ferdinand and Miranda can give themselves up to the transports of love : to him she is the top of admiration, so perfect and so peerless, of every creature the best ; she would not wish any companion in the world but him. But Prospero, who has himself passed through these raptures, experienced them and assessed them, looks on, with a smile of approbation, and says :

“ So glad of this as they I cannot be,  
Who are surprised withal ; but my rejoicing  
At nothing can be more.”

✓ In this play, then, Prospero is Shakespeare : or rather, Shakespeare in one phase. He recreates all the types and makes them move in procession. As each figure passes before him, it takes a little of his dramatic career away with it. And as Iris and Ceres and Juno and the Nymphs pass before his eyes—symbols of persons he had created during his twenty years of dramatic activity—the others are amazed at their richness and variety :

“ You do look, my son, in a moved sort,  
As if you were dismay’d . . . . .  
. . . . . These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air ;  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision  
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind : We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”

Is this, then, the final fruit of the Shakespearean wisdom—✕



“ Graves, at my command,  
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let  
them forth

But man wearies of it all. Of what avail is all this power, if it all ends in a sleep, a dream? He will break his staff and drown his book, bury it fathoms deep and drown it deeper than ever plummet sounded. But life is not lived in vain. "Be cheerful, Sir : our revels are ended." And Prospero will promise

He will hope to see the nuptial solemnised. Thus the drama of life will continue—hopefully, joyfully, rapturously for the young : peaceably and “ in calm of mind ” for the old. X

Before we pass on to the tragedies, we must revert for a while to an earlier character who has not hitherto been mentioned here, and yet one whom we would rather have than all the others in the brilliant galaxy of Shakespeare's comic characters. He is indispensable : we may do without others, but we cannot spare Sir John Falstaff. The only figure in English literature that can claim equal share in our affections is Mr. Pickwick. These two stand on a level apart : solid like themselves, laughable, but very loveable. Old Dr. Johnson was in love with Falstaff



tho' he had no high opinion of his valour; he was very angry with Morgann's critique, saying, "Morgann has proved him no coward; he may prove Iago a good character." Dryden thoroughly disliked him and described him as being "old, fat, merry, cowardly, drunken, amorous, vain and lying." Professor Bradley speaks of him as the enemy of anything serious, and Mr. Priestley considers him the supreme example of the clubbable man. He thinks, too, that short of virtue, he has everything; a bundle of contraries, a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without dignity, decency, or honour.

Falstaff is a comic character in the sense that his appearance on the stage prepares us for laughter and mirth. But it is well to remember that the laugh is as often with him as against him. "What thou art, we know not. What is most like thee?" He is without a peer. He is very popular with all people who do not stand too much on ceremony. He cannot get on with those who think much of themselves. Falstaff is a great humorist. He does not take anyone seriously, not even himself. How can anyone take offence at such a man?

The characteristic that we notice first in him is his charming *naivete*. He pretends he is as pure as the child, as innocent as the dove. He says to the Prince :

"Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal ! God forgive thee for it ! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing ; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked."

On another occasion he blames his companions for having led him to the paths of dalliance : they have deprived him of all opportunities of grace. He tells Bardolph :

"An I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of, I am a pepper-corn, a bre-



wer's horse. Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me."

Others have perhaps a different version to offer. But his pretensions to child-like innocence are delightful.

We notice next his inveterate habit of bragging. He might almost teach Gascons how to boast.

"I would to God my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is."

Or as he himself can say, none else, considering the circumstances :

"I am a rogue if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have escaped by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose ; my buckler cut through and through : my sword hacked like a handsaw."

We admire also Falstaff's ready wit. He is never at a loss for a retort : he is always at home in every company. He cannot be silenced. He can turn the most adverse and unwelcome of circumstances to his own advantage. He can explain away the most inconvenient situations. He calls Poins a coward. The latter threatens :

"Zounds, ye fat paunch, an ye call me coward, I'll stab thee."

Realising the necessity of immediate retreat, Falstaff replies :

"I call thee coward ! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward : but I would give a thousand pound I could run as fast as thou."



Falstaff goes on merrily from one false detail to another, adding inconsistency upon inconsistency, until the Prince can stop no longer and asks :

“ Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green, when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand? Come, tell us your reason : what sayest thou to this? ”

Falstaff is not quite clear as to what he should say : but he is not to be silenced. He breaks forth :

“ What, upon compulsion? No ; were I at the strappado, or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you on compulsion. Give you a reason on compulsion ! if reasons were as plenty as blackberries I would give no man a reason upon compulsion, I.”

Falstaff is rich in many respects, but most in regard to his vocabulary. He has a choice store of oaths, and not being a respecter of persons, showers them equally on all, high and low. The Prince—himself a prince of boon companions—calls him a sanguine coward, a bed-presser, a horseback-breaker, a huge hill of flesh. Nothing daunted, Falstaff replies :

“ Away, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat’s tongue, bull’s pizzle, you stock-fish—O for breath to utter what is like thee !—you tailor’s yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing-tuck ”—

He has wonderful self-possession. He has complete mastery over himself. When he is told by the Prince that he had been routed not by many but by just himself and Poins, and is asked to state ‘ what trick, what device, what starting-hole ’ he can now find out to hide himself



from this open and apparent shame, Falstaff is quite ready with an answer :

“ Why, hear ye, my masters? was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules ; but beware instinct ; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter ; I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince.”

How can anyone be angry with a man who can turn everything into a joke and a merry one at that?

He is a drunkard. He is a liar. He has been telling people the Prince owes him money. But when the Prince asks him :

“ Sirrah, do I owe you a thousand pounds? ”

What does Falstaff reply:

“ A thousand pounds, Hal ! a million ; thy love is worth a million ; thou owest me thy love.”

Falstaff is very frank at times, as when he describes the soldiers he has enlisted : “ I have misused the king’s press damnably.” On another occasion he ingenuously remarks, “ Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me,” and he recognises that he is not only witty in himself but the cause that wit is in other men. On the Shrewsbury battle-field he finds Percy dead on the ground. He had himself counterfeited death to escape Hotspur. He picks up Percy’s corpse, and, meeting Prince Henry and Prince John, says :

“ There is Percy [*throwing the body down*]; if your father will do me any honour, so ; if not,



let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you.

*P. Hen.* Why, Percy I killed myself, and saw thee dead.

*Fal.* Didst thou?—Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying !—I grant you I was down and out of breath, and so was he; but we rose both at an instant, and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so ; if not, let them that should reward valour bear the sin upon their own heads. I'll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh : if the man were alive, and would deny it, zounds, I would make him eat a piece of my sword."

In spite of his faults—and they are ' thick as dust in vacant chamber '—he who is Jack Falstaff to his familiars, John to his brothers and sisters, and Sir John to all Europe, is loved by all whom he meets. On the field of battle, he lies low on the ground, counterfeiting death, and Prince Henry sees him there, and is deeply moved :

" What, old acquaintance ! could not all this flesh  
Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell !  
I could have better spar'd a better man."

Mistress Quickly brings a case against him before the Lord Chief Justice : he says to Falstaff—" Pay her the debt you owe her, and unpay the villainy you have done with her." What does he do? He takes her aside, and makes her agree to pay him twenty nobles more. Then Doll Tearsheet regards him to be as valorous as Hector of Troy, worth five of Agamemnon, and ten times better than the nine worthies. She says again as he is summoned to the court :  
" I cannot speak ;—if my heart be not ready to burst,—



well, sweet Jack, have a care of thyself." Mistress Quickly feels the separation so keenly that she can utter no word until after his departure. Then she says :

" Well, fare thee well : I have known thee these twenty-nine years, come peascod time ; but an honestest and truer-hearted man,—well, fare thee well."

For such a man, so hearty, so frank, so well-liked, the final scene is one of unspeakable tragedy. He has loved the Prince deeply ; he has been bewitched with his company ; he has been given medicines to make him love the Prince. He looks forward to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter the wearing out of six fashions, to see him laugh till his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up. As he hears of the death of the old king he anticipates years of rest and honour and respect and patronage. He says airily :

" Master Robert Shallow, choose what office thou wilt in the land, 'tis thine."

He thinks he is fortune's steward. He assures Shallow the young king is sick for him. The laws of England are at his commandment. He goes to a public place near Westminster Abbey, and stands stained with travel, sweating with desire to see the king ; thinking of nothing else, putting all affairs else in oblivion. The king enters with his train.

" *Fal.* God save thy grace, King Hal ; my royal Hal !

*Pist.* The heavens thee guard and keep, most royal imp of fame !

*Fal.* God save thee, my sweet boy ! "

Still not a word, not one glance of recognition, not one syllable of reply. The king stares stonily, and says :



“ My lord Chief Justice, speak to that vain man.” Falstaff can scarce credit his ears. Is his great enemy the Chief Justice to address him on behalf of the prince on whom he has lavished the best that was in him? He makes one heart-broken, hopeful appeal more :

“ My King ! my Jove !  
I speak to thee, my heart ! ”

But the king is not moved :

“ I know thee not, old man : fall to thy prayers ;  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester ! ”

Is this the end of all that frank fellowship? Both the King and Falstaff had heard the chimes at midnight. Is this how that old friendship, that quick exchange of words and epithets harmless though violent, that daily and hourly association going to be renounced by a word? Not, if Falstaff is himself. He who has weathered so many storms, and has steered his bark safe through so many shoals, who has scored over so numerous a band of persons, how can he submit so tamely to such a shock? He assures Master Shallow :

“ Do not you grieve at this ; I shall be sent for in private to him : look you, he must seem thus to the world.”

And he determines to proceed forthwith to dinner and his bottle of sack. He lives in hope. His Hal, the lion's whelp will, he trusts confidently, send for him. But this consolation is denied him. He falls ill. The Hostess is certain the king has killed his heart : Nym is equally convinced that the king hath run bad humours on the knight. Pistol's manly heart doth yearn. He dies of a broken heart. But Mistress Quickly is sure that he is in Arthur's bosom.



Once again, in our study of this comic character, we come to Shakespeare's cardinal idea of life, that it is a mixture of good and evil, that every man has his share of sorrow and joy, some more, some less. No man can escape some measure of grief ; nor is anyone so wretched as to be absolutely deprived of all joy. Life had dealt very kindly with the fat knight for many years ; if it deals him a severe blow at the end, there is nothing to be surprised at in this.)

( 16 )

We have left to the last a consideration of the comic idea in Shakespearean tragedy. The traditional canon lays down that Shakespeare's mind developed somewhat in this order : light comedy, tragi-comedy, tragedy, romance. The implication of these four stages in the evolution of his art is that while he had the shallow unthinking optimism of the callow youth in his earlier plays, he emerged out of it and for a time allowed his joyous nature to be tinged with grief; later he was so thoroughly gloomy and sorrowful and depressed that he saw all round him only ruin and waste, perfidy and unchastity, death and malignant Fate and untoward Circumstance. It has been my attempt to show that such a conception is entirely mistaken, and that at every stage of his career he was able to see life steadily and see it whole. It may seem a somewhat desperate task to demonstrate this by reference to the tragedies.

Professor Dowden, to quote whom is almost a sign of grace in Shakespearean criticism, and a tacit reply to the challenge "under which king, Bezonian,?" is responsible for the phrase "In the Depths" as applied to Shakespeare's tragic period. He suggests that through 'Hamlet' and perhaps through events in his own personal history,



the poet had been reached and touched by the shadow of some of the deep mysteries of human existence. "Somehow," he proceeds, "a relation between his soul and the dark and terrible forces of the world was established, and to escape from a thorough investigation and sounding of the depths of life was no longer possible." Professor Bradley also says: "Speaking very broadly, one may say that these poets (Milton, Wordsworth and Shelley) at their best always look at things in one light; but *Hamlet* and *Henry IV* and *Cymbeline* reflect things from quite distinct positions." "While we have not in the tragedies," says Prof. Allardyce Nicoll, "that strange transcendental idealism which finds its fullest expression in *The Tempest*, we are given a mood wherein the whole of life becomes, after all, but a gay or a melancholy pageant." I shall venture, greatly daring, to suggest that the main Shakespearean idea is consistently the same.

✧ The earliest of the tragedies is *Romeo and Juliet*. It is a tragedy of impatience, of struggle against the pace set by nature, of want of restraint. Sudden passion seeks, as a modern writer has suggested, gratification, and desires to demolish all the barriers. That is how the tragedy is brought about. But what does the poet tell us? Does he ask us to sit in solemn grief, lamenting the ways of God and bewailing the rigours of Destiny? He opens the play thus with a dialogue between Sampson and Gregory, both servants to Capulet:

"*Sam.* Gregory, o' my word, we'll not carry coals.

*Greg.* Nay, for then we should be colliers.

*Sam.* I mean, as we be in choler, we'll draw.

*Greg.* Ay, while you live, draw your neck out o' the collar."



So the poet can indulge in puns and ask us to laugh at them. He is interested in the poetry of situations more than in the minds of the characters. Benvolio and Mercutio talk as smartly and light-heartedly as in a comedy. Mercutio describes Romeo coming 'without his roe, like a dried herring.—O, flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified !—Now is he for the numbers that Petrarch flowed in; Laura, to his lady, was but a kitchen—wench,—marry, she had a better love to be-rhyme her ; Dido, a dowdy ; Cleopatra, a gipsy ; Helen and Hero, hildings and harlots ; Thisbe, a grey eye or so, but not to the purpose." Even Romeo can talk in that strain—' O single-soled jest, solely singular for the singleness.' There is, too, a frankly comic scene, immediately after Capulet and Lady Capulet and Paris are asked by the Friar to follow Juliet's corpse to the grave :

" *Peter.* Musicians, O musicians, ' Heart's ease, Heart's ease.' O, an you will have me live, play ' Heart's ease.'

*1 Mus.* Why ' Heart's ease? '

*Pet.* O musicians, because my heart itself plays ' My heart is full of woe : ' O, play me some merry dump to comfort me.

*1 Mus.* Not a dump we : 'tis no time to play now.

*Pet.* You will not, then?

*1 Mus.* No.

*Pet.* I will, then, give it you soundly.

*1 Mus.* What will you give us?

*Pet.* No money, on my faith ; but the gleek,—I will give you the minstrel.

*1 Mus.* Then will I give you the serving-creature.

*Pet.* Then will I lay the serving-creature's dagger on your pate. I will carry no crotchets : I'll *re* you, I'll *fa* you; do you note me?



- 1 Mus.* An you *re* us and *fa* us, you note us.
- 2 Mus.* Pray you, put up your dagger, and put out your wit.
- Pet.* Then have at you with my wit ! I will dry-beat you with an iron wit, and put up my iron-dagger,—answer me like men :
- When griping grief the heart doth wound,  
And doleful dumps the mind oppress,  
Then music with her silver sound—  
Why ‘ silver sound ? ’ Why ‘ music with her silver sound ? ’—what say you, Simon Calling ?
- 1 Mus.* Marry, sir, because silver hath a sweet sound.
- Pet.* Pretty ! what say you, Hugh Rebeck ?
- 2 Mus.* I say ‘ silver sound ’ because musicians sound for silver.
- Pet.* Pretty too !—what say you, James Sound-post ?
- 3 Mus.* Faith, I know not what to say.
- Pet.* O, I cry you mercy : you are the singer : I will say for you. It is ‘ music with her silver sound ’ because musicians have no gold for sounding.”

This scene has not had enough attention paid to it. In its own humble way it is as significant and important as the porter-scene in *Macbeth*. What precedes the scene is the deeply touching grief of her parents on the supposed death of Juliet. “ Out alas ! she’s cold,” exclaims Capulet. Lady Capulet wails :

“ But one, poor one, one poor and loving child,  
But one thing to rejoice and solace in,  
And cruel death hath catch’d it from my sight.”

The Nurse curses this as the blackest and most woeful day. They all depart to use the bridal flowers for a buried corpse. The wedding hymns are changed to mournful dirges.



In an atmosphere such as this, when people are apt to lose their balance and ignore the other side of the picture, the servant Peter and the musicians bring us down to solid earth. The relief thus provided is necessary also because of the scene that follows. There Romeo is told by Balthasar that Juliet's body sleeps in Capel's monument and her immortal part lives with angels. The impetuous lover, who has trusted the flattering eye of sleep and whose dreams have presaged some joyful news, is thunderstruck, and resolves upon a desperate deed : " Well, Juliet, I'll lie with thee tonight." The light scene of the musicians and Peter is thus preceded and followed by scenes of great grief and sorrow and despair. It serves to reassure us.

In this first tragedy, apart from these glimpses into a lighter world of sunshine and smiles, even taking the tragic story only into consideration, we can hardly see any trace of that hardening of the heart, that insensate fury against the world and the general scheme of things, that impotent rage against Fate and the divine hierarchy, which some critics regard as the chief features of the tragic drama. It is one of the triumphs of Shakespeare's mind that it continues equable, well-balanced and hopeful even in spite of the disasters, the undeserved failures, the premature deaths, that he describes in his plays. Do Romeo and Juliet die? Does Mercutio die? Is Lady Montague dead of grief? Is Tybalt slain? Well, they are slain, and there is an end of the matter. They would have died in any case, later, if not now. It is a pity that they die prematurely, but none but man himself is responsible for incidents such as these. We cannot—Shakespeare does not—blame the moral order of the universe for them. That is why, invariably, in every tragedy, the hero who has suffered most sees things in their proper perspective.



In this, the earliest of the tragedies, the Prince decides what the cause of all the bloodshed is :

“ Where be these enemies? Capulet,—Montague,—  
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate.”

The result of all this loss is good. Romeo and Juliet have not died in vain. The ancient feud between the two houses is banished. Montague is to raise Juliet's statue in pure gold and Capulet will make as rich a statue of Romeo.

( 17 )

The first great Shakespearean tragedy is *Julius Cæsar*. The story is not his, but the treatment is. If there is a tragedy it concerns only an individual or a few individuals ; it is not general. We shall not be detained by the Roman plays, except to remark that in *Julius Cæsar* we laugh at the conversation of Flavius and Marullus with a rabble of citizens, at the inconsistencies of the citizens after the two funeral orations, at the discomfiture of Cinna the poet; that in *Antony and Cleopatra*, we laugh at the witty conversation of Charmian, Enobarbus, Iras and Alexas, and at the foolery of the Clown who comes just before Cleopatra's death; and that in *Coriolanus*, the laugh is against the mutinous citizens, at the conversation of Menenius, Sicinius, and Brutus, and at Coriolanus' encounter with the servants in Aufidius' hall. Yet the Clown in *Antony and Cleopatra* deserves a word to himself. Let us recall the situation. Antony has killed himself; Cæsar is victorious; Cleopatra will dress herself in her best attires and put on her crown. She prepares to die. Then comes this scene :

“ *Re-enter Guard, with Clown bringing a basket.*



*Guard.* This is the man.

*Cleo.* Avoid, and leave him.

[*Exit Guard*]

Hast thou the pretty worm of Nilus there  
That kill and pains not?

*Clown.* Truly, I have him : but I would not be the party that should desire you to touch him, for his biting is immortal ; those that do die of it seldom or never recover.

*Cleo.* Remember'st thou any that have died on't?

*Clown.* Very many, men and women too. I heard of one of them no longer than yesterday : a very honest woman, but something given to lie ; as a woman should not do but in the way of honesty : how she died of the biting of it, what pain she felt,—truly she makes a very good report o'the worm ; but he that will believe all that they say shall never be saved by half that they do : but this is most fallible the worm's an odd worm.

*Cleo.* Get thee hence ; farewell.

*Clown.* I wish you all joy of the worm.

[*Sets down the basket.*]

*Cleo.* Farewell.

*Clown.* You must think this, look you, that the worm will do his kind.

*Cleo.* Ay, Ay ; farewell.

*Clown.* Look you, the worm is not to be trusted but in the keeping of wise people ; for indeed there is no goodness in the worm.

*Cleo.* Take thou no care : it shall be heeded.

*Clown.* Very good. Give it nothing, I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding.



*Cleo.* Will it eat me?

*Clown.* You must not think I am so simple but I know the devil himself will not eat a woman ; I know that a woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not. But, truly, these same whoreson devils do the gods great harm in their women, for in every ten that they make the devils mar five.

*Cleo.* Well, get the gone; farewell.

*Clown.* Yes, forsooth : I wish you joy o' the worm.

[*Exit.*"]

As the Clown departs, Cleopatra declares she has immortal longings in her; she imagines she hears Antony call :

“Husband, I come:

Now to that name my courage prove my title!

I am fire and air; my other elements

I give to baser life.”

In a scene so touching in its pathos, so sublime in its delineation of faithful love, why does Shakespeare bring in the Clown? His foolery seems an impertinence; almost a concession to the demands of his contemporary audience; a lowering of the tragic flag. On superficial observation this is the view. But looked at closer, from the vantage-ground of Shakespeare's complete work, perhaps a different explanation is available. As in the foolery of Peter and the musicians in *Romeo and Juliet*, so here, the comic scene is introduced of set purpose. It is not calculated principally to pander to the taste of the Elizabethan ‘ gods ’: if they were pleased, well, very well indeed. But the scene has been put in to provide well-needed relief to the audience and the reader. Emotion has been so deeply stirred and is going again to be so deeply stirred that we heartily welcome—because we badly need—some rest, some shelter in



the normal atmosphere of the world, some haven in what we regard and should regard as our common share in day to day life. The events of the play are extraordinary, unusual, frightening. The dramatist desires to bring us to a realisation of the fact that there is still and despite these events, perhaps even because of them, room for pleasantries, for mirth, and for humour. It is true the laughter is grim, connected with death and suicide. But the laugh itself enables us to be reconciled with life.

(18)

Let us turn now to the four great tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth*. These are regarded as Shakespeare's highest achievements ; in these he is believed to have sounded the farthest depths of nature; here he is supposed to have illustrated a definite criticism of life. It is not our present purpose to consider the various theories of Shakespearean tragedy. Professors Bradley and Allardyce Nicoll have dealt with the subject exhaustively. Our purpose is to consider the comic elements in these plays and to coordinate them with our view of Shakespeare's whole philosophy of life. That the entire atmosphere of these plays is different from that of the plays of other periods admits of no doubt: there is so much that is horrible and so much that is pitiable. Pity and terror are both aroused in abundant measure. Tears fall ceaselessly from our eyes and our hearts bleed in sympathy for those we see suffering and dying. As we see good men falling into ruin, clinging to supports that prove treacherous, looking in vain for help; simple men being deceived by the crafty ; old men insulted by their own children ; children and new-born babes being strangled to death; virtuous maidens being stabbed or drowning themselves ; promising careers prematurely cut short; kings murdered; adultery and perfidy flourishing;



the defeat of virtue, and the triumph of vice—we ask ourselves, “What is the good of it all? Is there a benign being, who rules the universe and orders the scheme of things? How can he be good if he allows matters to be so decided?” The eternal question is asked again, “If God is good and all-powerful, why does he allow evil not only to exist but also to prevail?” This is the question we are led to ask. And what answer does Shakespeare provide? Does he rush in where both religion and philosophy have hesitated to tread? He smiles and smiles, and his smile is as much of an enigma as the question itself. But that he has the heart to smile gives us hope. If he who creates and develops the tragic situations and characters can smile; he who saw so clearly and vividly into the tragic side of the world as to produce a tragic universe himself; he who was so thoroughly familiar with the darker aspect of character, on intimate terms with ghosts and spirits; he who had supped full with horrors—if such a man can provide occasion for laughter and afford himself to laugh, we can perhaps see a slightly different picture than we imagine at first.

It is true that when Shakespeare comes to write *Hamlet*, his sense of life's seriousness has become keener. There is not the boisterousness of his early years; he has lost the buoyancy and the light heartedness. He sees now that well-meaning and honest endeavour can lead to failure and ruin. Hamlet is anxious to do right, to perform his duty, though it is distasteful. He does ultimately perform it, but only after many unfortunate innocent people have been killed, and the duty is performed only as the prince himself is about to die. In the physical worldly material sense Hamlet's life is a tragedy; but it ceases to be one from the moral point of view. The principle of virtue emerges triumphant. The reign of vice



and iniquity was short-lived ; for a little while things had gone wrong, very wrong, tragically wrong. The king had been poisoned upon his secure hour by his younger brother : while sleeping, he had been at once despatched by a brother's hand of life, of crown, of queen. The Queen, who would hang on him, married the usurper, within a month of his death, ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes. This murderer had ascended the throne. The simple, confiding Ophelia had been deeply wounded by Hamlet's treatment, first only affrighted and then hurt terribly. Polonius had been stabbed to death. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been killed. Ophelia had fallen in the weeping brook and her garments had pulled her from her melodious lay to muddy death. The Queen had drunk the poisoned drink. The King had been stabbed. Laertes had been killed. And finally Hamlet, the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword had died also. Corpse upon corpse ; murder and suicide ; the innocent and the guilty suffering grievously—the forces of hell seemed for a time to have been let loose, and the good and the gracious were punished. But though there have been carnal, bloody and unnatural acts, accidental judgments, casual slaughters—we have a survivor of them all, Horatio, who will report the cause aright. He who is not passion's slave, and whose blood and judgment are so well commingled that he is not a pipe for fortune's finger to sound what stop she please, Horatio is present, an emissary from the regions of hope, peace and good will, a tangible evidence that ultimately evil is to be subdued and right is certain to succeed. Hamlet dies, it is true ; but even at the moment of death he has the satisfaction of seeing the final downfall of evil. He dies confident of the triumph of good. And not only does he himself look forward to felicity ; the survivors are equally



convinced that he is to be eternally happy. Flights of angels will sing him to his rest. But even on the earth, the last scene is one of triumph. The materially successful Fortinbras says :

“ Let four captains  
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage ;  
For he was likely, had he been put on,  
To have prov'd most royally ; and, for his passage,  
The soldier's music and the rites of war  
Speak loudly for him.”

We are almost persuaded that all this massacre and waste and tragedy has been worth while because of the ultimate vindication of the principles of right and justice. What matter a few deaths and a few lacerated hearts? A few shattered hopes, and a few pledges broken into fragments? Finally Hamlet succeeds. His hands are weak, and his nerves failing, but his vision is good and he sees the truth and its triumph.

Though the moral order is ultimately justified, there were in the interval moments of doubt and despair. In this atmosphere, then, of severe and strenuous earnestness, how does Shakespeare proceed to create laughter?

The first time we can detect a smile on our lips is when to the long and tedious homily of Laertes, Ophelia replies :

“ But, good my brother,  
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven ;  
Whilst like a puff'd and reckless libertine,  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,  
And recks not his own reed.”

But it is just a passing pleasantry and leaves no impression behind.



Then we laugh at Polonius, and his laboured and pompous speeches. Our first taste of them we get in the following :

“ My liege, and madam,—to expostulate  
What majesty should be, what duty is,  
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,  
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.  
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,  
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes  
I will be brief : your noble son is mad :  
Mad call I it ; for to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad? ”

The Queen is impatient of this long-winded inane oration. “ More matter with less art,” she says. Polonius is scandalised. Pompousness is so ingrained in him that to him it seems perfectly natural to speak in this style :

“ Madam, I swear I use no art at all.”

And even at the moment of swearing, a life-long habit asserts itself, and he proceeds :

“ That he is mad, 'tis true : 'tis true 'tis pity ;  
And pity 'tis 'tis true : a foolish figure ;  
But farewell it, for I will use no art.  
Mad let us grant him, then : and now remains  
That we find out the cause of this effect ;  
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,  
For this effect defective comes by cause :  
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus :  
Perpend.”

We laugh at this inflated manner of speech. There is no humorous incident. The element of comedy is in the character of the speaker and in his words. We continue to laugh at his expense as long as he lives. Hamlet makes fun of him :



*Pol.* My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

*Ham.* Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

*Pol.* By the mass, and 'tis like a camel indeed!

*Ham.* Methinks it is like a weasel.

*Pol.* It is backed like a weasel.

*Ham.* Or like a whale?

*Pol.* Very like a whale.

*Ham.* Then will I come to my mother by and by.—"

We laugh at him until we find him slain behind the arras.

There is plenty of witty and smart conversation at which we laugh—the light talk of young undergraduates, leaning a little to the side of obscenity :

*Guil.* On fortune's cap we are not the very button.

*Ham.* Nor the soles of her shoe?

*Ros.* Neither, my lord.

*Ham.* Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

*Guil.* Faith, her privates we.

*Ham.* In the secret parts of fortune? O, most true ; she is a strumpet."

Hamlet is in a merry mood when the Players visit him :

"O my old friend ! Thy face is valanced since I saw thee last ; comest thou to beard me in Denmark?—What, my young lady and mistress ! By'r lady, your ladyship is nearer heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine. Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring."

Then again, when the king talks to him, the Prince is witty :

*King.* How fares our cousin Hamlet?



*Ham.* Excellent, i' faith ; of the chameleon's dish :  
I eat the air, promise-crammed : you cannot feed  
capons so.

*King.* I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet ;  
these words are not mine.

*Ham.* No, nor mine now."

After the Players have finished and the king rises in sullen anger, Hamlet is in high spirits and he is pleased and satisfied that he has at last driven the king's guilt home. Just then come the two friends whom he regards as perfidious.

" *Guil.* Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with  
you.

*Ham.* Sir, a whole history.

*Guil.* The king, sir,—

*Ham.* Ay, sir, what of him?

*Guil.* Is, in his retirement, marvellous distempered.

*Ham.* With drink, sir?

*Guil.* No, my lord, rather with choler.

*Ham.* Your wisdom should show itself more richer  
to signify this to his doctor ; for, for me to put him  
to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far  
more choler."

✓ More significant, however, than all this is the Gravediggers' scene which aroused the righteous ire of some early critics by its apparent incongruity with the rest of the play. Let us look at it a little carefully. Hamlet has been exiled and Polonius killed. This has proved too heavy a burden for poor Ophelia, the rose of May, who comes fantastically dressed with straws and flowers. She distributes rosemary for remembrance, pansies for thoughts, fennel and columbines, rue and daisy and violets. This document in madness moves us to tears. A little



later we are told of her death by drowning. Our feelings are deeply agitated. We had not protested very loudly against events before this. But now the tyranny, the lawlessness, the injustice of the world cannot any longer be tolerated. We are on the verge of angry despair. Having taken us so far, having plunged us into the deeps of sorrow, having dealt with our feelings as though he were sovereign over them, Shakespeare decides to give us a respite. He gives it lest we be confirmed in our gloom and believe in the forces of darkness alone. He gives it lest we forget that sunny creatures like Portias and Rosalinds and Violas also exist, happy in their union with Bassanios and Orlandos and Orsinos. He gives it lest we ignore Falstaff and Feste and Launcelot. But he will not, even in this brief respite, let us quite emerge out of the tragic atmosphere. He will make us laugh, but he will deal with death and skulls and the graveyard. And we breathe a sigh of relief. If these which we have regarded as symbols of horror and grief and separation can be laughed at, why, then, they cannot surely be after all such terrible things as we had imagined.

“*2 Clown.* Nay, but hear you, goodman delver.

*1 Clo.* Give me leave. Here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good: if the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes,—mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself: argal, he that is not guilty of his own death, shortens not his own life.

*2 Clo.* But is this law?

*1 Clo.* Ay, many, is't; crowner's quest law.”

There is also a good deal of pleasant nonsense about the first gentleman and a puzzle about the grave-maker.



The grave-digger sings as he digs : a song about youth and the sweetness of love, about age and its ills, about a pick-axe, spade and a shrouding-sheet. He sings but the subject of the song is the whole life of man. Then Hamlet moves forward :

*Ham.* Whom dost then dig it for?

*1 Clo.* For no man, sir.

*Ham.* What woman, then?

*1 Clo.* For none, neither.

*Ham.* Who is to be buried in't?

*1 Clo.* One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead."

The whole scene has taken our attention away to the fun of the conversation and to general considerations of what may have happened to the dust of Alexander and of Cæsar. We have almost forgotten the dead Ophelia and the enraged Laertes. Just as we are about to lose our consciousness of the immediate present in meditating with Hamlet on these abstract questions, we are rudely awakened by the funeral procession of Ophelia. Once more passions break out ;—the Queen's pathetic cry—"I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd;" and Laertes' leap into the grave and his prayer, "from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring;" and Hamlet's declaration, "forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum." Let the passions take their course. We have the strength to watch them because of the grave-diggers who had transported us to the regions of workaday life and re-established our contact with commonplace verities.

With that laughter ceases. But though we do not laugh any more, we do not shed tears of despair, but only of pity. Ophelia shall be a ministering angel and flights of



angels will sing Hamlet to his rest. A noble heart is cracked, it is true, but not in vain. The times will no more be out of joint. Life's normal events will again happen. The brave and practical Fortinbras has Hamlet's dying voice and with his accession to the throne we are reassured that all is for the best.

( 19 )

*Othello* conforms to the rules of tragedy more than any other play of Shakespeare's. He who could establish his greatness by breaking all laws and by being a law to himself, wanted to prove his greatness also by observing the laws to which others were subject. He could prove to the university wits that they could be beaten on their own ground too. Being closely modelled on the classical drama, their play differs from the others in giving less latitude to the poet and in limiting the scope of his invention. But whatever else he may do he will not be untrue to life as he sees it, he will not depict it in the darker shades alone, he will not be deaf to its music nor blind to its beauty. He will describe the love of Desdemona, which disregards narrow considerations of race, blood, nationality, is all-trusting, and faithful until and even beyond death. He will describe the extreme trustfulness of Othello. If Desdemona is stabbed and Othello kills himself, and Emilia is killed by Iago, what then? The poet has shown that beauty and faith and love exist; that perfidy seems to succeed but at last fails; that these deaths are to be regarded as abnormal occurrences and not by any means inextricably woven into the texture of life. Apart from this, the inner spirit of the play, there is the outer aspect. There we have in the third Act the brief appearance of the Clown.



*Clo.* Why, master, have your instruments been in Naples, that they speak i' the nose thus?

*Mus.* How, sir, how?

*Clo.* Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

*1 Mus.* Ay, marry, are they, sir.

*Clo.* O, thereby hangs a tale.

*1 Mus.* Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

*Clo.* Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know. But, masters, here's money for you: and the general so likes your music that he desires you, for love's sake, to make no more noise with it.

*1 Mus.* Well, sir, we will not.

*Clo.* If you have any music that may not be heard, to 't again: but, as they say, to hear music the general does not greatly care."

In Act III, Sec. 4, the Clown appears again, and we have one more attempt at humour:

*Des.* Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?

*Clo.* I dare not say he lies anywhere.

*Des.* Why, man?

*Clo.* He's a soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies is stabbing.

*Des.* Go to; where lodges he?

*Clo.* To tell you where he lodges is to tell you where I lie."

Not very much in it all: the foolery is not in the best style of Shakespeare's clowns.

There is not much genuine humour in all this. This Clown must be the poorest of all Shakespeare's fools, the merest novice in his profession. But the point to notice is his presence and his efforts at joking. Enough for our purposes that joking is still possible; enough that love



such as Desdemona's exists. It is true we pity Othello in his delusion. It is true we pity Desdemona as she asks, greatly wondering, "Am I that name, Iago?" At Othello's final act of madness, we are inclined to repeat his own words :

"Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration."

Why do these things not happen? Only because they do not normally happen. Othello's jealous obsession leaves him : he sees what a mad fool he has been. Desdemona is fond and faithful to the end. "Nobody, I myself" she replies to Emilia's question, "Who hath done this deed?" Othello recounts what he has been and what he has done when he has been himself : he has done the state some service : he has taken the circumcised dog by the throat and smitten him even as he stabs himself for having been false to the real Othello, for having mis-interpreted his real character. Our sense of right is restored ; the balance has been correctly struck, and we finish with the assurance that so far as that 'demi-devil' Iago is concerned :

"If there be any cunning cruelty  
That can torment him much and hold him long,  
It shall be his."

Meanwhile Cassio who survives and succeeds where Othello had failed, pays to the unhappy dead Moor the tribute

"He was great of heart."

( 20 )

The tragedy of *King Lear* is even more sad than that of Othello or that of Hamlet. There is something radi-



cally wrong with the situation in the play, a flaw in the natural order of things. The normal course would have been for Lear to love Cordelia and for Gloster to love Edgar. The tragedy has its origin in this initial mistake. An old man is misled by violent and exaggerated professions of affection. What upsets him is that Cordelia has 'nothing' to say to him, Cordelia who has loved him so and whom he loves so deeply. This is the first shock to him. As Kent intercedes for her the King's keen disappointment finds expression :

“ I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest  
On her kind nursery.”

That the situation is unnatural is perceived by the King of France, who says :

“ This is most strange,  
That she, who even but now was your best object,  
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,  
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice  
of time  
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle  
So many folds of favour.”

Just as Goneril and Regan are ungrateful daughters, so Edmund is an ungrateful son. This twofold unnaturalness produces much ruin and ravage. So enraged does Lear become at Goneril's conduct that he curses her :

“ Turn all her mother's pains and benefits  
To laughter and contempt ; that she may feel  
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child.”

Gloster is blinded and turned out of his castle : he says :

“ As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods,  
They kill us for their sport.”



The old Lear and the old Gloster arouse all our pity and sympathy, and to a large extent our sense of terror is awakened also. Cordelia describes her wandering father thus to the Physician :

“ Alack, ’tis he ; why, he was met even now  
As mad as the vex’d sea ; singing aloud ;  
Crown’d with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,  
With harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,  
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow  
In our sustaining corn.”

And when Edgar actually sees him, he says :

“ I would not take this from report ;—it is,  
And my heart breaks at it.”

When the physicians have treated him and Cordelia speaks to him, he cannot believe that any person can address kind words to him :

“ Pray, do not mock me ;  
I am a very foolish, fond old man,  
Four score and upward, not an hour more nor less ;  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.”

Just as Edmund on his death-bed seeks to atone for his past by confessing the plot against Cordelia’s life, enters Lear with Cordelia dead in his arms. Lear falls down dead also and Kent utters his singularly impressive words, among the most moving in all Shakespeare :

“ Vex not his ghost : O, let him pass, he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this rough world  
Stretch him out longer.”

| All this is tragic enough. Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall all die. There is plenty of waste and death in this



play, as in the others. There is the sense of undeserved failure, of stern Fate, of cruel Providence. But this is all on the surface. In our heart of hearts, we are convinced that here, as elsewhere, there is nothing essentially wrong with the world ; here, as elsewhere, men blunder and their blunder leads to ruin ; here, as elsewhere, things are bound ultimately to right themselves. Does not Albany say :

“ This shows you are above,  
You justicers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily can venge.”

And does not Edgar say to his dying brother :

“ The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.”

Moreover, Lear and Cordelia themselves, before they die, are satisfied that despite all they have gone through, at last they have reached the harbour of peace and happiness. The old King fondly looks forward to it :

“ Come, let's away to prison :  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage ;  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down  
And ask of thee forgiveness : so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies.”

Being restored to lucidity, he can see more clearly, and in the light of this wisdom which he has attained through adversity, through contact with storms and tempests and through insanity itself, he assures Cordelia :

“ Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense.”

In this atmosphere of calm serenity and firm hope the



play ends after the horrors and griefs and terrors through which we have been conveyed.

But though this serenity is attained at the end, the play is not without light touches in the earlier parts. The Fool in this drama is a much more important character than Clowns are in a tragedy. He helps the king, for he

“ Labours to out-jest  
His heart-struck injuries.”

He is necessary to keep the balance of mind both of the old king and of the spectators. He appears first on the stage when Lear has been insulted in Albany's palace and rudely spoken to by Oswald. If he had not been luckily present, the situation might easily have degenerated into one lacking in dignity, for the king might have forgotten his position so far as to strike the villain. The Fool is not a mere fool : in his words there is much wisdom.

“ *Fool.* How now, nuncle ! Would I had two cox-combs and two daughters !

*Lear.* Why, my boy ?

*Fool.* If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my cox-combs myself. There's mine ; beg another of thy daughters.

*Lear.* Take heed, sirrah,—the whip.

*Fool.* Truth's a dog must to kennel ; he must be whipped out, when the lady brach may stand by fire and stink.”

After the fool—‘ a bitter Fool,’ Lear calls him—has done his fooling, Goneril comes and gives another shock to the old man, who is struck dumb, and can only ask, “ Are you our daughter ? ” As he comes out, he is followed by the Fool who indulges in a little more foolery to restore balance to the king's mind ; he will sorely need this antidote a little later.



*Fool.* Thou canst tell why one's nose stands i' the middle on's face.

*Lear.* No.

*Fool.* Why to keep one's eyes of either side's nose, that what a man cannot smell out, he may spy into.

*Lear.* I did her wrong—

*Fool.* Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

*Lear.* No.

*Fool.* Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has has a house.

*Lear.* Why?

*Fool.* Why, to put his head in ; not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case."

The Fool remains constant and accompanies the king through all his disasters and he receives ample reward for his fidelity, for almost the last words of the king are those of lament for him—"And my poor Fool is hang'd." He has all through recognised the value of the Fool's company. It is after one of the Fool's pleasantries that Lear utters that heart-rending prayer of his :

"O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven,  
Keep me in temper ! I would not be mad !"

When he is ill-treated by Regan, he turns again to the Fool and confides to him—"O fool ! I shall go mad !"

( 21 )

Speculation, jealousy, ingratitude, of these the poet had provided brilliant studies in earlier tragedies : of one vice more he was to treat—of o'ervaulting ambition, of its evil aspects, of the criminal lengths to which it can be carried, of the moral blindness it inflicts even on a character



thoroughly noble. "Fair is foul and foul is fair" is a dictum believed in by the agents of darkness. Shakespeare has no doubt which is the justice, which the thief. The laws of life are grossly abused by Macbeth and grievously will he suffer for the transgression. The mere thought had unfixed his hair and made his seated heart knock at his ribs. He asks the stars to hide their fires. He is afraid to think what he has done, look on it again he dare not. He sees daggers before his eyes ; and Lady Macbeth has heard the owl scream and the crickets cry. She takes the daggers and proceeds to the bed chamber of the murdered Duncan.

Evil has reached the height of its infamy. The general who had been full of the milk of human kindness ; " brave Macbeth ; " " valiant cousin, worthy gentleman ; " " valour's minion ; " " noble Macbeth " : in cold blood, unprovoked, murders one who had delighted to honour him and was his king and guest. No wonder the heaven's lights are out ; no wonder Macbeth cannot cry ' Amen ' to the prayer, ' God bless us ; ' no wonder Glamis and Cawdor and Macbeth shall sleep no more. So extraordinary and brutal are the circumstances, so horrid is the deed, so inconsistent with morality and decency is the success of the act, that the spectator may perhaps at this stage be tempted to attack the ways of God and consider that iniquity alone can flourish on earth. The poet's point is that all this that has happened, the hectic scene, the midnight murder, the unsexing of Lady Macbeth, the degradation of Bellona's bridegroom, all this is abnormal. What is normal is sleep and rest and mirth. Our mind is in a state of fever. We are tossed on the sea of fear and alarm and disgust. We long for escape from this sickening atmosphere. We seek for any instrument of distraction. How can we continue to dwell



in the presence of this abominable thing? Just then there is knocking within. We breathe a sigh of relief. But Macbeth goes on, startled by this sound into realisation of the enormity of his deed, and says :

“ Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No ; this my hand  
will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine  
Making the green one red.”

Lady Macbeth comes with her hand bathed in blood. Horror upon horror ! Outrage on nature followed by greater outrage ! What next? we ask in dread despair. But the poet is merciful, and there is yet more knocking.

[“ *Enter a Porter. Knocking within*

*Port.* “ Here’s a knocking indeed ! if a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key [*knocking*]. Knock, knock, knock. Who’s there, i’ the name of Beelzebub? Here’s a farmer that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty : come in time ; have napkins enow about you ; here you’ll sweat for’t—[*knocking*]. Knock, knock ! Who’s there, i’ the other devil’s name? Faith, here’s an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale ; who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven : O, come in, equivocator [*knocking*]. Knock, knock, knock ! Who’s there? Faith, here’s an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose : come in, tailor, here you may roast your goose.—[*knocking*]. Knock, knock : never at quiet ! What are you?—But this place is too cold for hell. I’ll devil-porter it no further : I had



thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire.”

No wonder in this atmosphere he talks of Beelzebub and the other devil ; of equivocators and traitors. For do not the witches palter with us in a double sense, and keep the word of promise to our ear and break it to our hope? And does not Macbeth commit treason? But the Porter is not going to devil-porter it any further. He knows that not all will tread the primrose path to the ever-lasting bonfire. He comes down to solid earth, to his normal work, to the perquisites of his office—“ I pray you, remember the porter ; ” and with that he opens the gate. To make the transition from the abnormal to the normal, from the horrors of the witching time of night to the sober happenings of the day, more complete, we have the following colloquy :

“ *Macd.* Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed, that you do lie so late?

*Port.* Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock ; and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things.

*Macd.* What three things does drink especially provoke?

*Port.* Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes and it unprovokes ; it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance : therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery : it makes him and it mars him ; it sets him on, and it takes him off ; it persuades him and disheartens him ; makes him stand to, and not stand to ; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and, giving him the lie, leaves him.

*Macd.* I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.



*Port.* That it did, sir, i' the very throat o'me : but I requited him for his lie ; and, I think, being too strong for him, though he took up my legs sometime, yet I made a shift to cast him."

So our thoughts are light again and we breathe in the atmosphere which does not frighten us.

The pall having been lifted to allow a glimpse of sunshine, it descends again. It continues until we find the evil-doers repentant, Lady Macbeth exclaiming in her sleep—"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand," and Macbeth realising that for nothing has he degraded his nature :

"I have liv'd long enough ; my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf ;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have."

We are reassured that good men will at last be happy, that evil cannot flourish for ever. For all his apparent success, what does Macbeth gain at the end of his evil career? He hoped to have the palm of victory ; his hands are full only of dust. He is sick of life, of life as he has lived it.

"It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing."

And no wonder. For he is killed by Macduff and his wife by self and violent hands takes off her life. This is the inevitable end of iniquity. Surely, then, as the time is free, and the heavy weight of misery is uplifted, we may once more, as always, re-echo the words of the master :

"Be cheerful, sir ;  
Our revels now are ended."



# HAMLET

## AN INTERPRETATION

### (1)

No character in dramatic literature, and probably none in history—with the possible exception of Napoleon—has been the subject of so much study as Hamlet. In almost every country where English is understood scholars have attempted to read, understand, and interpret his character. From every point of view, in all its phases, the soul of Hamlet has been laid bare, peeped into and botanised over. Shakespeare's genius is so all-embracing that theories the most diverse and contradictory have been found to suit the character : the height of perverse ingenuity having been reached by Ed. P. Vinting who, in 1881, solemnly argued and proved to his own satisfaction at least that Hamlet was a woman in disguise, and in love with Horatio. That the character would baffle analysis, that it was one in which there could be found something of every theory and everything of no theory, that more than other men, this man would retain a large measure of mystery as inscrutable as life itself, Shakespeare probably anticipated. " You would play upon me ; you would seem to know my stops ; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery ; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. . . 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? ", he asks Guildenstern, and though he and his cause have been reported aright, and by no less a scribe than Shakespeare himself, he still has about him the royal hauteur of " the Dane," and while others abide our question, he is free.

Shakespeare is such a consummate artist that he makes his readers forget that they are reading a play,



that the persons that have their exits and entrances are merely players, that they exist only in the fine frenzy of the poet, and that while they have a local habitation and a name, they are in truth only airy nothing. "The play's the thing"; it is forgotten that its end, "both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." The mirror is often confused with what it merely reflects; the play is mistaken for real life. Hamlet, the imaginary prince of the play, is treated as a live prince, actually deprived of a kingdom, his father kill'd and mother stain'd. That is the danger. "That way madness lies." The final verdict must be that of the creator. His words are available. What does Shakespeare say? How does he treat the character? What was his design in creating it?

Before these questions are considered, and an answer attempted, it will be well to recall what theories have been held on the subject of Hamlet's character. Steevens (1778) emphasises what he calls the immoral tendency of his character; Hamlet, in his view, cannot be said to have pursued his ends by warrantable means; his conduct was every way unnatural and indefensible, unless he were to be regarded as a young man whose intellects were in some degree impaired by his own misfortunes, by the death of his father, the loss of expected sovereignty, and a sense of shame resulting from the hasty and incestuous marriage of his mother. One or two other critics similarly regard Hamlet as a great man, but wicked; not "full of the milk of human kindness," but one incapable of the emotion of love, who finds it possible to spurn the affection of Ophelia, to speak daggers to his mother, to sacrifice his school friends in sport, to kill his uncle, not to avenge his father's murder but in self-defence. This opinion is not held by any, and has only to be stated



to be discredited ; it goes completely against the spirit of the play. How can he be so wicked? Even Claudius, his bitterest enemy, is constrained to observe :

“ he, being remiss,

Most generous and free from all contriving.” In his last breath Laertes addresses him as “ noble Hamlet.” It is mere madness of psychological subtlety to regard him as another Iago, plotting against everybody, wicked in spirit and action, totally free from all moral sense. Indeed, to think so is to betray a complete want of appreciation of the spirit of Shakespearean tragedy. Pity, sympathy, liking, admiration,—these are extorted from us by all his tragic heroes. We may condemn Lear for his folly and want of perception : but who so hard that does not shed tears of pity to think of his fate, when, broken down, he says :

“ I am a very foolish, fond old man,  
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more or less ;  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.”

We think Macbeth is over-ambitious ; his murder of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's little children strikes us with horror. But is there not also mingled with that a sense of tears and of the essential impotency of man against destiny as Macbeth, deceived by the juggling fiends that keep the word of promise to our ear, and break it to our hope, ends his career, exclaiming, “ At least we'll die with harness on our back.” Similarly, as we finish reading the tragedy of the Moor of Venice, do we not all exclaim even as Othello did, “ But yet the pity of it, Iago !—O Iago, the pity of it, Iago ! ” Oh no, Hamlet may be anything else—weak, vacillating, a dreamer, a philosopher, a Uni-



versity wit, a melancholy muddler—but wicked, immoral, he certainly is not.

There is, next, the view of Goethe, himself to Germany what Shakespeare is to England. He says : “ Tender and nobly descended, this royal flower grew up under the direct influences of majesty ; the idea of the right and of princely dignity, the feeling for the good and the graceful, with the consciousness of his high birth, were unfolded in him together. He was a prince, a born prince. Pleasing in figure, polished by nature, courteous from the heart, he was to be the model of youth and the delight of the world. Figure to yourselves this youth, this son of princes, conceive him vividly, and then observe him when he learns that his father’s spirit walks : stand by him in the terrible night when the venerable ghost itself appears before him. A horrid shudder seizes him ; he speaks to the mysterious form ; he sees it beckon him ; he follows it and hearkens. The fearful accusation of his uncle rings in his ears ; the summons to revenge and the piercing reiterated prayer : “ Remember me ! ” and when the ghost has vanished, whom is it we see standing before us ? A young hero panting for vengeance ? A born prince, feeling himself favoured in being summoned to punish the usurper of his crown ? No ! Amazement and sorrow overwhelm the solitary young man ; he becomes bitter against smiling villains, swears never to forget the departed, and concludes with the significant ejaculation, “ The time is out of joint : O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right ! ” . . . . Here is an oak tree, planted in a costly vase, which should have received into its bosom only lovely flowers ; the roots spread out, the vase is shivered to pieces. A beautiful, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off ; every duty is holy to him,—this



too hard. The impossible is required of him,—not the impossible in itself, but the impossible to him. How he winds, turns, agonises, advances, and recoils, ever reminding himself, and at last almost loses his purpose from his thoughts, without ever again recovering his peace of mind.”

This conception of Hamlet as a hot-house plant brought into an exotic atmosphere, a gentle, peace-loving nature called upon to take revenge and unfitted for the task, a bundle of noble emotions and pure intellect, without either the inclination or the will to act with determination, is also, I think, a mistaken one. ‘And it is not right to give to the appearance of the ghost a greater importance than it possesses ; while the ghost does undoubtedly exercise an enormous influence on Hamlet’s subsequent conduct, his character remains essentially consistent all through. Even before the ghost appeared, or was heard of, Hamlet was “in the clouds.” His first soliloquy,—self-revelation—uttered before Horatio and the others tell him about the ghost, is merely the echo of his last words. Clouds still hang on him :

“ How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world ! ”

Then there are others, like Campbell, who think that the trouble with Hamlet is that he has intellect in excess, that it is ungovernable and too subtle. That there is some truth in this we shall presently see, as also in Hudson’s view that what Hamlet lacks is not force of will, but force of self-will. Richardson, to some extent, anticipating Coleridge’s theory, says : “ Hamlet is exhibited with good dispositions, and struggling with untoward circumstances. The contest is interesting. As he endeavours to do right, we approve and esteem him. But his original constitution renders him unequal to the contest ; he displays the weak-



nesses and imperfections to which his peculiar character is liable ; he is unfortunate ; his misfortunes are in some measure occasioned by his weakness ; he thus becomes an object not of blame, but of genuine and tender regret." Coleridge, his mind steeped in contemplation of " subjective " and " om-jective," already a victim of laudanum, " just, subtle, and mighty," imagined that he had a smack of Hamlet in himself. This flattering unction has been laid to their souls by many others since Coleridge's time ; it soothes one's vanity to feel that such a man as Hamlet—if indeed, not Shakespeare himself—was like one's self. A man like Coleridge, content the whole day long to talk on forever, as Hazlitt said ; producing nothing, not even poems ; doing nothing ; lost in a verbal vacuum—was pleased that in Hamlet he had found a character akin to his own. He preferred to ignore and brush aside all those aspects of Hamlet's character which went against this self-complacent view. Following Coleridge, other John-a-dreams, living in the enervating miasma of unavailing visions, have imagined that they are Hamlets. This is losing sight of the fact that all tragic heroes are exceptional persons, placed in exceptional circumstances. " The Hamlet within us " may as well lead to " the Othello within us," or " the Macbeth within us," or " the Brutus within us." We have in us the germ of jealousy, of ambition, of public service. Othello is more jealous, Macbeth more ambitious, Brutus more imbued with the sense of public service than other men ; they suffer accordingly, as others do not.

Coleridge went on to say : " Shakespeare intended to portray a person in whose view the external world and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet



beheld external things in the same way that a man of vivid imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees what has previously made an impression on his organs . . . . . Endless reasoning and hesitating, constant urging and solicitation of the mind to act, and as constant an escape from action ceaseless reproaches of himself for sloth and negligence, while the whole energy of his resolution evaporates in these reproaches."

(2)

Now, a careful and unbiassed reading of the play will show (1) that Hamlet is a man of action; (2) that he loves Ophelia ; (3) that he has a wholesome measure of ambition in him ; (4) that he is passion's slave ; (5) that something prevents him from taking instant revenge ; (6) that he is in love with words and phrases ; (7) that his moral sense is abnormally developed ; and (8) that when he chooses he can act with quickness and decision.

Hamlet does not hesitate to follow the ghost. Horatio and the others warn him against going with it. " Why, what should be the fear? ", asks Hamlet. He is determined to go, even though it tempt him toward the flood, or to the dreadful summit of the cliff ; his steps do not falter. " By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." When the ghost makes the revelation to him, there is no trace of indecision or shilly-shallying. He is shocked : that is natural. But he is not stunned, he can make up his mind, he is eager to act :

" Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge."

Much against his inclination, he decides to give up all thought of Ophelia ; there is no trace of dreaminess in that. He can make up his mind about the play and insert



a passage in it. He stabs Polonius. He hoists the engineer with his own petar, by opening the King's letter and forging a new one and returning, unexpected, to Denmark. On sight of Ophelia's grave, he can instantaneously leap into the grave, and fight Laertes. He can stab Claudius, and force him to drink the poisoned wine to its dregs. He can snatch poison away from Horatio's hands. Even as he lies dying he can discharge his royal responsibility and proclaim that Fortinbras has his dying voice. All through the play, then, that Hamlet shows that he is a man of action ; mistakenly, it may be, blunderingly perhaps, he does act. Why, then, does he delay to kill the King, and why does he reproach himself for inaction?

“ Now, whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on the event,—  
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part  
wisdom  
And ever three parts coward,—I do not know  
Why yet I live to say “ This thing's to do.”

The plain answer of course is, If he did not delay, there would be no drama ! But that apart, it seems clear that Shakespeare felt that a person, constituted as Hamlet was, would have delayed, under these circumstances, the task of revenge. Let us see how warmly, and without doubt, sincerely, Hamlet promises :

“ Remember thee?  
Yea, from the table of my memory  
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
That youth and observation copied there ;  
And thy commandment all alone shall live



Within the book and volume of my brain,  
Unmix'd with baser matter ; yes, by heaven ! ”

He gets numerous opportunities to act ; he can kill Claudius, or expose him, or directly accuse him. But can he depend on the ghost alone ? He may believe in it implicitly, but who else will ? His accusation, unsupported by other evidence—even Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo are not present during the ghost's revelation—can only be ascribed to a mind diseased. He himself has a passing doubt that it may be an evil spirit. Ostensibly, therefore, to satisfy his own scruples, he adopts several plans. He may himself be prejudiced, so he asks Horatio to watch the King during the play. Till then, it may be urged, Hamlet has not been unduly delaying. But after his suspicions and the ghost's words receive confirmation from the King's conduct, there is a fine opportunity ; heaven is ordinant. The King is alone, and praying, and Hamlet “ might do it pat.” He says, too, “ And now I'll do't.” But irresolution again overtakes him. He moves away and the King is safe. For a moment, after killing Polonius, he hopes he has despatched Claudius, and asks expectantly, “ Is it the King ? ” He knows that the King is plotting against him, and sending him away to England. Yet he does nothing.

Why ? The correct answer is suggested by a modern critic,\* who says that when Hamlet was implored by his father's ghost to avenge his murder, and in particular to put an end to the incestuous marriage between his mother and the murderer, his conscious resolve, made with all the force of his will, was to obey his father. But the shock which he suffered on hearing of the murder, and particularly on realising the full horror of his mother's remarriage,

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\* Mr. A. Clutton-Brock.



made, as it were, a wound in his mind, which hurt whenever he thought of the murder, or of his uncle, or of his mother's connection with his uncle. The pain of the wound was so sharp that unconsciously, he flinched from it and seized every pretext to forget it. He would will to remember it as he willed to take vengeance ; but here " the law of reversed action " worked within him. The more he tried to force himself into action, the more his unconscious invented pretexts why he should delay to act. In fact, the play is made by Hamlet's irrelevance, not by his purpose of revenge. It is the essence of the tragedy that this irrelevance, the result not of any weakness in Hamlet's character but of nervous shock, causes many deaths where there should be only one, and causes Hamlet to misexpress himself in action and in talk.

2. Hamlet loves Ophelia. He hath importuned her " with love in honourable fashion." He is a young man, with all a young man's enthusiasm and love of romance. Ophelia, the pretty daughter of Polonius, is the lucky individual to inspire his first love. She, in the fresh atmosphere of maiden love, believes implicitly in him. And they were both happy in their love, and confident of a happy and peaceful future. Then comes the Ghost. All old values are upset. The prospect for Hamlet is darkened. The hope that he may live " in some boundless contiguity of shade," where talk of discord may not be is gone. His ideals are shattered. For him his mother was the highest type of woman ; than her none was higher, nobler. If she can act like this, marry another and unworthier husband so soon after the death of her first husband, if she can be guilty of such perfidy, what can he say but that " Frailty ! thy name is woman." All women must be alike. If Gertrude can fall, why so must Ophelia. And thus the insidious poison works, and Hamlet's views



on women undergo a complete change. The idol is shattered and sent grovelling in the dust. But his love is deathless and strong. He still loves her, can love none else. In this mood he goes to her, and we have the touching description from the startled Ophelia :

“ He took me by the wrist and held me hard ;  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,  
And, with his other hand thus o’er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As he would draw it. Long stay’d he so ;  
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being ; that done, he lets me go,  
And with his head over his shoulder turn’d  
He seem’d to find his way without his eyes ;  
For out o’doors he went without their help,  
And to the last bended their light on me.”

Thus he bids her farewell. This is the last that she is to see of her lover. Henceforth, he ceases to be Hamlet. No more the joys of love for him. When he meets her next, it is in a casual way. When he writes, however, his love breaks out :

“ Doubt that the stars are fire ;  
Doubt that the sun doth move ;  
Doubt truth to be a liar ;  
But never doubt I love.”

And once again, only once more while she lives, for one brief moment, he shows his tenderness to her : “ Lady, shall I lie in your lap ? ” It is after her death, when for himself the problem of existence is nearing solution, when



“ how ill all’s here about my heart,” that, hurt by Laertes’ boastful words, his final confession finds fit utterance :

“ I loved Ophelia ; forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love  
Make up my sum.”

Why, then, does he spurn her? Why does he say, “ I never gave you aught ”? Why does he repeat, “ I loved you not ”? And finally why does he inflict the cruel blow: “ Get thee to a nunnery, go.” If it is held that he is mad, that explains it. But he is not mad ; he never has been. The reason for his apparent cruelty is twofold : in his present circumstances, he cannot think of love and marriage. Heavier burdens are laid on him. He is involved in a tangle that may drag him into untimely death. Why should he make Ophelia share his uncertain fate? In his overwhelming compassion he seeks to release her. But at the same time he loves her so that he cannot bear the thought of her marriage with anybody else ; so he must send her to a nunnery, where she will be far away from the sinful atmosphere of the Court. He is harsh to her because she is a woman ; he is kind to her because he loves her. Thus the apparent contradiction of his conduct is explained.

3 Hamlet is ambitious. It is true that he says : “ O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have had dreams.” But Claudius thinks that he is ambitious. Hamlet does, indeed, ironically refer to it when he says : “ Sir, I lack advancement.” But towards the end, when he is talking in confidence to Horatio he includes, among his grievances against the King that he has “ popp’d in between the election and my hopes.” One of the most attractive traits of his character is his affec-



tion for Horatio. To him he clings to the last ; he is the one person whom he takes into his confidence ; him he requests to absent himself from felicity awhile “ to tell my story.” He cannot bear that the world should think ill of him ; he dreads to leave behind him “ a wounded name.” The reason why he has chosen to grapple Horatio to him with hoops of steel, why he has sealed him for himself, is that Horatio is not “ passion’s slave.” Likings go by contraries ; a man ever admires most the quality he is most lacking in himself. A dreamer thinks highly of a soldier ; a warrior admires a singer most. Horatio has been

“ As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing.”

whereas Hamlet himself is as a pipe “ for fortune’s finger to sound what stop she please.” Then, too, Horatio is not attached to the Court, and Hamlet can still imagine himself, in his presence, in the common-room of the University.

While Hamlet is not a mere dreamer, can act when he likes, is brave and courageous, it cannot be denied that words have an irresistible fascination for him. He relishes them, he revels in their use. As a man values a dear gift, turns it about, admires it from every facet, keeps it always by his side, so Hamlet cherishes a fine phrase, runs after a word, uses it in diverse senses, employs them “ tropically,” loses himself in them, is intoxicated with them. He assures Polonius—with no realisation of its deeper implication—that he reads “ words, words, words.” As one of Farquhar’s characters cries, “ Words, words, or I shall burst.” What Hamlet regrets more than other things is silence : “ But break my heart for I must hold my tongue.” Expression is to him the vital principle of existence ; he must speak out ; silence is dreaded by him. Yet from



the necessity of the case, strict silence is imposed on him. He has to be content thus with his soliloquies ; there he lets us see that he is himself puzzled why he cannot carry out the behest of the ghost. But even in the soliloquies where there is nobody to listen to him he is very particular about his expression. He has the artist's love of beauty for its own sake ; he has an artistic dislike for ugliness, whether in action or in words. He is scandalised by the ugly expression " mobled queen," just as he is scandalised by Laertes' ugly action in leaping into Ophelia's grave. His sense of justice is satisfied when he labels his uncle as " a smiling villain," as though to say, " You have done me an injury : I am doing you an equal injury by stigmatising you as a smiling villain. We are quits." The mention of the word " heaven " in his soliloquy, while the King is praying, is enough to turn him away from his " fell purpose " for a while. He mentions a word, and pursues it, and explores all its possibilities. Even after death his one anxiety is that his story should be told aright. We can feel that he would be pained by inadequate description. How frequently he lapses into academic speculation ! He does so not merely because these high and moving thoughts of life and death and life beyond death occupy his mind, but also because on the table of his memory youth and observation and study and meditation have copied saws of books, forms, pressures. In his words there are reminiscences of Pindar and Juvenal ; he is a scholar among princes and a prince among scholars.

(3)

Why, then does Hamlet fail? (What is the tragedy, and what is it due to? Aristotle said : " Tragedy is an imitation of some action that is serious, entire, and of some magnitude—by language, embellished and rendered pleasur-



able, but by different means in different parts—in the way, not of narration, but of action, effecting through pity and terror the correction and refinement of such passions.” He went on to lay down that the three things in a Tragedy, stated in order of their importance, are Plot, Character, and Thought. Now, it is well-known that Shakespeare was a law unto himself. Dryden says he was “taught by none.” He almost always disregarded the rule regarding unities of time, place, and action. But so far as this essential of Aristotelian tragedy is concerned—purging the emotions by means of pity and terror—it may be admitted that he adopts the Greek conception of it. All his tragedies, arouse these two feelings, pity for the victim and horror at the enormous waste of life, and the ruin of a soul. This ruin, in Shakespearean tragedy, is induced mainly by the character of the hero and partly by circumstance, Destiny, or Fate. The four essentials of character laid down in “*Poetics*” are that it must be good; propriety, verisimilitude, and consistency are the other requisites. The hero should be “a person neither eminently virtuous or just, nor yet involved in misfortune by deliberate vice or villainy, but by some error of human frailty.” As Prof. Lewis Campbell says: “Every tragic action consists of a great crisis in some great life.” This applies as well to Greek as to Shakespearean tragedy; the difference is that in the former it almost invariably issues from fate or accident or divine agency, in the latter character, personality plays an important part. Dowden well says of Shakespeare’s tragedies, “The only fatality is the fatality of character.” Of the nature of the tragedy in Shakespeare, the best and certainly the most convincing statement is the following: “Character is destiny as Novalis says; yes, but not in the sense that certain elements of personality have predestined the chief agent to a certain doom. The



pity of it combined with awe and horror turns upon our conviction that in other circumstances the possibilities of evil which for the time have triumphed, might have been overruled by still greater possibilities of good." ) A continued m.p.

X This being the general principle, what precisely is the nature of the tragedy in *Hamlet*? Briefly stated it is this: that a noble prince, endowed with so many sterling qualities, the glass of fashion and the mould of form, has to be involved in a tangle which he cannot unravel, that harmless men like Polonius, innocent persons like Ophelia and Laertes should die, that the hero himself should die with his task accomplished only by accident, that so much waste and unnecessary sacrifice should end in general ruin. Of course, the tragedy differs in nature in different plays: in *Othello*, it is that a virtue—trustfulness—should be transformed into a vice—blind jealousy; in *Macbeth*, that all the other virtues, bravery, loyalty, hospitality, kindness, should be subordinated to inordinate ambition. In these two it is character, pre-eminently, that is at fault; the heroes are almost perfect, but for a flaw which, however, is fatal. Accident in *Othello* and the witches in *Macbeth*, do play a prominent part in bringing the tragedy about, but these two external things merely exploit defects already present in the character. In *Hamlet*, however, it is not character so much that is responsible as the special situation in which that character is placed and called upon to perform a task from which it recoils. It is the tragedy not of *action*, as the others are, but of a disinclination to act. The hero can act, but will not, and in not acting, in the way in which a normal man would have acted, induces "havoc, and spoil, and ruin." If only Hamlet's lot had been cast in other circumstances; if only the time had not been out of joint; if any duty but that of revenge had been laid upon him; if, in brief, his horoscope had not been



cast so narrowly—the tragedy would not have happened. That it does happen and involves so many others that are more or less “mutes or audience to this act” causes horror ; that it should happen, above everybody else, to a man so near perfection as Hamlet causes pity. And thus, once more, we are made to listen to “the still sad music of humanity,” and to recognise the truth of Virgil’s sentence : “Sunt lacrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.” The temptation is to echo Calderon’s words :

“For the greatest crime of man  
Is that he was born.”

But Shakespeare never leaves us so disconsolate and in such a mood of “impious stubbornness.” He does not directly set out to “justify the ways of God to man.” Nor does he end, as the Greeks do, on a note of forced peace and contentment :

“Blessed be ye in heaven ! and blest on earth.”  
—(*Euripides.*)

Shakespeare’s heroes are not blessed on earth ; of earthly happiness they are deprived, but we repeat the words of Laertes : “A ministering angel shall my sister be,” and those of Horatio :

“Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest !” \*

What is meant by the remark that Shakespeare’s tragedies chasten us is that we do not feel inclined, after reading them, to blame the moral order. We may not all be happy ; the fault may be ours. People whom we love suffer ; the good die young ; vice flourishes. All this may be, and yet we say : “How good is man’s life, the mere living !” To the normal man there is plenty of material for pleasure and happiness in “this goodly frame, the earth, this most excellent canopy, the air, this brave



o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire." Tragedies happen : they are few. Man has great and many vices ; they are overshadowed by his essential goodness. Shakespeare assures us : " What a piece of work is a man ! how noble in reason ! how infinite in faculty ! in form and moving how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a God ! the beauty of the world ! the paragon of animals ! "

## (4)

A great deal has been written on the question of Hamlet's madness. Furness' new Variorum Edition devotes no fewer than forty pages of small print to a consideration of this problem. Our best guide is not what commentators have written, but the play itself ; and in the play, there are three tests, what a man does, what he says and what others think and say of him. Considered in these three aspects, there should, I believe, be no doubt with regard to the answer that the problem should have, and it is that *Hamlet was not mad*. Seneca, indeed, quotes, " Aristoteli, nullum magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiæ fuit " ; but that apart, if Hamlet has any madness in him it is that frenzy of which melancholy is the nurse. Nor is his melancholy that of Jaques, who can suck it out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs. Rather is it like that of Antonio, who knows not why he is so sad. *Hamlet* may be—it has been so described—a study in melancholy. But it is not right to look upon Hamlet as principally a melancholy person. For does he not jest with Ophelia, make fun of Polonius, make Osric ridiculous, bandy jokes with the grave-diggers ? Indeed, he is normally a very merry prince, so merry as to find a quip and a pun irresistible. Why, then, is he melancholy ? Already when we first find him alone on the stage he is in



its fell grips. He is weary of life. It may be only a fashionable pose, as is Portia's when she says : " My little body is aweary of this great world." But what is deserving of note is that he is thinking of the everlasting's " canon ' gainst self-slaughter." The reason is that his mother's second marriage has hurt him, has wounded his sense of propriety and upset his cherished belief in woman-kind. In this mood the ghost appears and confirms his distrust of women and suspicion against the King. But, while he is determined to take revenge, he has not quite settled the ways and means. A tentative scheme suggests itself, merely occurs for a brief moment, and is then thought of no more. He mentions to his friends the possibility that he " perchance hereafter shall think meet To put an antic disposition on." We hear nothing about it. When next we are told about Hamlet, it is in Ophelia's excited and surprised words : " Oh, my lord, I have been so affrighted ! " :

" My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced ;  
No hat upon his head ; his stockings foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ankle ;  
Pale as his shirt ; his knees knocking each other ;  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me."

If this describes a madman, surely it is one who is mad with love, and not with the harrowing knowledge of some secret crime. It is proper that child-like Ophelia should be affrighted ; it is her first—and last—acquaintance with the passion of love. No more for her the experience of impetuous, hot-headed love. Let him who doubts that the description above is that of the typical lover of the Eli-



zabethan drama, read the "marks" that Rosalind's "uncle" had observed in "a man in love" :

"A leane cheek, which you have not : a blew eye and sunken, which you have not : an unquestionable spirit, which you have not : a beard neglected, which you have not : then your hose should be ungarter'd, your bonnet unbanded, your sleeve unbutton'd, your shooe unti'd, and everything about you, demonstrating a careless desolation : but you are no such man "

(*As You Like It*, III, 2).

On hearing this description from Ophelia, the egregious Polonius, with whom the wish is father to the thought, jumps to the conclusion, "This is the very ecstasy of love," and he must needs go and prove his sapience to the King, and assure him that he has found "the very cause of Hamlet's lunacy." All the evidence that we have so far regarding Hamlet's conduct is contained in the King's description of it to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in which he speaks of "Hamlet's transformation" ; the Queen speaks in the same scene of "My too much changed son." The Queen knows her son and attributes his "distemper" to the right source—"His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage." Hamlet, of course, is changed ; who would not be, after the ghost's revelation? He confesses himself, "I have of late,—but wherefore I know not,—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises. . . Man delights not me ; no, nor woman neither." And that is the alteration that causes dread and anxiety to Claudius and leads Polonius to the epoch-making discovery :

"Your noble son is mad :  
Mad call I it ; for, to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad ?"



They plan a trick ; the father forgets himself in the courtier, and agrees " to loose my daughter to him." Hamlet enters, discovers from Polonius' manner that there's tricks i' the world," that he is spied upon ; he has already heard that the King considers him to be mad. The moment he is convinced of that, he enters into the humour of the situation and acts the lunatic as "to the manner born." And yet, as even Polonius has the intelligence to detect, "though this be madness, yet there is method in it." Of course there is, not only method, but matter, satire, sound sense, sarcasm, and that for the reason that he is not mad ! And just as he escapes the scrutiny of " the tedious old fool," two more spies appear, though he does not yet think them to be so. He welcomes them heartily—" good lads, how do ye both ?" They both seem to bring with them a breath of fresh and pure air free from the pestilential atmosphere of the Court. He talks to them quite naturally, jests with them about Fortune's cap, with the freedom of an undergraduate. He talks about dreams and shadows in the manner of a scholar given slightly to pedantry. He even confides in them : " To speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended." And then the suspicion comes : " Were you not sent for? ", and as he sees them hesitate, " come, deal justly with me." Surely his early friends will tell him the truth, and they do, after some prevarication. That gives them away—" Nay, then I have an eye of you." And yet he cannot all at once distrust them and give them up as definitely belonging to the hostile camp. He conjures them " by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love " to be frank with him. He tells them, " My uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived," and " I am but mad north-north-west." No lunatic ever spoke like that it means " I



am mad when I am in the presence of people connected with the Court ; my madness is assumed." He is quite natural and sane ; and the moment Polonius re-enters he can say like Macbeth, " Now comes my fit again." The " antic disposition " is cast off as soon as the players come and he talks to them with the graceful condescension of a prince, compliments them, offers them sound advice, and states such excellent dramatical precepts that it appears absurd that they should have been intended to be uttered by a madman. He plots the play so that he may tent the king to the quick. Nowhere does it appear that he is really mad.

In the third Act, the King to whom a guilty conscience has taught a keener perception than to the rest, asks Rosencrantz if he cannot get from Hamlet the reason " why he puts on this confusion." The repetition of Hamlet's own word " put on " cannot be purely accidental and shows that the madness or confusion is to be regarded as assumed. When Hamlet enters, he is in the midst of a spoken reverie, so akin to his first soliloquy, " Oh, that this too too solid flesh " that it appears that temperamentally he is just as he was when the play began. " To be or not to be " is merely a continuation of that. He discovers Ophelia and not remembering that he is to act the madman, solemnly says :

" Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd."

Then, soon, his suspicion returns; he feels that Ophelia has been sent as a decoy and he makes up his mind to be harsh to her. " Ha ! ha ! are you honest ?—means " Are you to be trusted ? Have you not come as a spy ? " He lapses into his armour—baffling words apparently incoherent but concealing a wealth of meaning. The King has seen through it, and he declares :



“ Love? his affections do not that way tend ;  
 Nor, what he spake, though it lack'd form  
a little,  
Was not like madness.” ✕

Hamlet next talks to the player : there is no touch of madness in that. He talks solemnly to Horatio and makes him his sole confidant : that is not a madman's action. And then comes the play. He answers the King ironically, makes fun of Polonius, talks in a very broad, even rude fashion to Ophelia. He does the last, mainly because of his contempt for the female species, and partly because he wants to cure Ophelia of her love for him as he anticipates that love cannot be for them. A little later, he assures Guildenstern, “ My wit's diseased,” the rather to let Guildenstern carry that mistaken, but general opinion away with him. He protests against their going about to recover the wind of him, as if they would drive him into a toil. He does not talk wildly. When Polonius comes he convinces the old man that he is mad, and being satisfied that he has succeeded in producing that delusion, announces : “ Then will I come to my mother by and by.” Before the play commences, Hamlet utters a sentence which ought to be convincing that the madness is not real : “ They are coming to the play ; I must be idle.” The last proof is in the scene with his mother, where, surely, he is sane and serious. He is trying to save a soul ; he almost succeeds. In that moving scene, where he speaks daggers to his mother, he says :

“ Ecstasy ?

My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,  
 And makes as healthful music ; it is not madness  
 That I have utter'd ; bring me to the test,  
 And I the matter will re-word, which madness



Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,  
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,  
That not your trespass, but my madness  
speaks."

No madman, in fiction, drama or real life, ever spoke like that.

It is abundantly clear that Shakespeare did not intend Hamlet to be really mad. Of actual madness we have a picture in Ophelia, and in King Lear. That is real madness. True, Hamlet excuses his conduct to Laertes on the ground of "madness"; but the madness to which he refers is the wildness and passion that came to him when he saw Laertes leap into the grave. One critic says "To think he does not mean there what he says is to think very badly of Hamlet." Precisely. But about this "madness," he had told Horatio :

"But sure, the bravery of his grief did put me  
Into a towering passion."

Where, then, is the evidence for Hamlet's madness? The distraction was merely "a towering passion." The utmost that can, with any show of reason, be stated on the side of distraction is what Dr. Bucknill says (*The Mad Folk of Shakespeare*): "Hamlet is a reasoning melancholiac, morbidly changed from his former state of thought, feeling and conduct. . . Yet, like the melancholiacs described by Burton, he is "of profound judgment in some things, excellent apprehensions, judicious, wise, and witty; for melancholy advanceth men's conceits more than any humour whatever." But an attempt has been made to show above that Hamlet is conscious all through that he is feigning madness, that he can assume it at will and discard it when he so chooses.



## TWO MISJUDGED CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE

### ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Shakespearean critics seem to be agreed that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were created, in contrast to Horatio, as a type of perfidious, fair-weather friends. This view has been expressed by almost every writer of note and is now accepted without question. Professor Dunn says, "When those we thought our friends play us false, the latent egoism of our natures is aroused, and we have less pity for them than for our inveterate enemies." This is in justification of Hamlet's action. But apart from this eagerness of the critics to discover an antithesis to Horatio, what is there in the drama to support their view? "The play's the thing," and, forgetting the commentators, let us look at the play.

When do we first hear of them? Let us recall the circumstances. Hamlet has seen his father's ghost, learnt the circumstances of his death, and put off for ever the dreams he had long cherished of a quiet future, a happy home and a prosperous kingdom. His most firmly-rooted notions tumble down. "Frailty, thy name is woman"; "A man may smile and smile and be a villain"—these are two truths he has discovered with a shock. He must abandon the hopes he had nourished during his days at Wittenberg. He is face to face with the grim realities of an unusual situation. "The time is out of joint." The cursed spite makes him responsible for the undoing of the mischief. His mother is foul. His mother! How can



he look with respect on any woman now? And yet he loves Ophelia ; forty thousand brothers cannot, with all their quantity of love, make up his sum. Then, too, his is to be, else sinning greatly, a dedicated spirit, dedicated to the task of revenge, distasteful but yet solemnly sworn to. He does not quite know what he must do. The burden is too heavy and too irksome for him. He thinks it meet, in the absence of any definite plan and in order to put off the moment of action, to put on an antic disposition. He naturally alarms the guilty Claudius who thinks out ways and means for getting at the root of Hamlet's mind. Meanwhile the Prince will have a last interview with his Ophelia, a final meeting before the link with the past is snapped. He has not the heart to leave her without a farewell. And yet when he meets her what does he say? He, the lord of language, the coiner of choice phrases, who can exchange smart compliments with the cleverest men, he can say nothing, is tongue-tied like a bashful youth, and after a long and lingering stare, goes out of her presence. A moment before his death he says to Horatio, "The rest is silence." Without audible utterance he says the same to Ophelia.

"He took me by the wrist and held me hard ;  
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,  
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face,  
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so ;  
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,  
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,  
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,  
And end his being : that done, he lets me go,  
And with his head over his shoulder turn'd,  
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes ;



For out o' doors he went without their help,  
And to the last bended their light on me."

No wonder, then, that people are alarmed. Ophelia has been so affrighted. Polonius, in his wisdom, decides that this is the very ecstasy of love, and the King and Queen are puzzled.

This is the situation when Act II. Sc. ii begins with the King's speech :

" Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern !  
Moreover that we much did long to see you,  
The need we have to use you did provoke  
Our hasty sending."

The two gentlemen are ' worthy,' and the King has need of their services.

" Something have you heard  
Of Hamlet's transformation ; so call it,  
Since not the exterior nor the inward man  
Resembles that it was. What it should be,  
More than his father's death, that thus  
hath put him  
So much from the understanding of himself,  
I cannot dream of ; I entreat you both,  
That, being of so young days brought up with him,  
And since so neighbour'd to his youth and humour,  
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court  
Some little time ; so by your companies  
To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather  
So much as from occasion you may glean,  
Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,  
That, open'd, lies within our remedy."

We, who are in the secret and know the King for what he is, can read in these words an appeal for espionage.



We can see the King is afraid : he makes a request where he may command—" Vouchsafe your rest here." But is there anything in the speech which will indicate any underhand motive? An affectionate uncle and stepfather is naturally anxious for his heir. Something has been worrying him : what can be more natural than that he should send for the Prince's intimate fellow-students so that they may enliven him by their presence and thereby take him out of the " dumps " ? That the King is double-faced they cannot, have no reason to suspect. Any possible suspicion is completely set at rest by the Queen's remarks which follow :

" Good gentlemen, he hath much talk'd of you,  
And sure I am two men there are not living  
To whom he more adheres."

The two simple gentlemen are overwhelmed. The King makes a request to them. The Queen asks them to expend their time with her awhile for the supply and profit of her hope. Their friend the Prince, they are assured by the Queen, adheres to them. Naturally they are pleased and offer their services willingly. They have no suspicion, nor has the good Queen, that they are to act as spies. Guildenstern says :

" Heavens make our presence and our practices  
Pleasant and helpful to him ! "

And the Queen says :

" Ay, amen ! "

In this scene, then, these two are innocent of any plot against the Prince. They go to meet him with no secret intention. They have the King's request and the task is congenial. If they can serve the Prince and bring him nearer to the King what can be more desirable?



Hamlet has been listening to Polonius : he is weary, and tired, and listless. The stilted words and politic sentences of the old courtier have disgusted him into the exclamation—"These tedious old fools." Just then come Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet's melancholy is dissipated, and he welcomes his old friends with great heartiness. The atmosphere of the University—so free compared with that at Court—seems for the moment to return and the Prince is translated into a different region where he can forget all the intrigues of the Court and all the recent happenings. He can become his natural self, throwing off the mask he has thought fit to put on :

"My excellent good friends ! How dost then, Guildenstern?—Ah, Rosencrantz? Good lads, how do ye both? "

He has no suspicion yet of them. He bandies retorts with them like any irresponsible gay undergraduate :

*Guil.* "On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

*Ham.* Nor the soles of her shoe?

*Ros.* Neither, my lord.

*Ham.* Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

*Guil.* Faith, her privates we.

*Ham.* In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh, most true, she is a strumpet."

And in this strain they proceed for some time longer. Then comes the first rift in the lute, the first jarring note is struck when Rosencrantz refers to Hamlet's ambition, and the Prince replies :

"O God, I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have had dreams,"



This, however, is only a shadow that passes away and the Prince thinks well of his friends still. "We'll wait upon you," they say. But Hamlet will not treat them but as friends :

"No such matter ; I will not sort you with the rest of my servants ; for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended."

He takes them into his confidence ; they will, he trusts, sympathise with him. My servants, he says, and all around me, are acting as spies. I cannot trust them. You are different and I will not rank you with them. What is there in these words to justify Professor Dowden's comment that Hamlet speaks like an honest man, but knows his meaning will not be understood? Up to this point he has been straight with them. Then, as Denmark is a prison to him, he asks why they have been so foolish as to come there.

"*Ros.* To visit you, my lord ; no other occasion." This is perfectly true, and Hamlet believes it.

"*Ham.* Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks ; but I thank you ; and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a half-penny."

Since he has learnt to doubt every person—was not his mother false?—he wants to make quite sure that Rosen-crantz and Guildenstern are not spies :

"Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me ; come, come ; nay, speak."

What can they say? They have been sent for by the King and Queen ; but they cannot say so. Hamlet is eager to believe that they have come of their own free will. "Come, deal justly with me ; come, come,"—is a pathetic appeal.



But they are honest and yet must respect the confidence of the King. They are confused. There is a clash of loyalties. Hamlet's suspicion is aroused by their hesitating manner :

“ Nay, then I have an eye of you.” And he makes one more appeal—

“ If you love me hold not off.” Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can resist this appeal no longer : the deeper loyalty of friendship prevails and they truthfully say :

“ My lord, we were sent for.”

It is natural that the Prince should feel hurt, natural that he should resent this further attempt on the part of the King to probe his secret. The two friends do not take his long prose speech seriously, treat it merely as evidence of his ‘ transformation.’ Rosencrantz starts the topic of the players, and for a while, in conversing on the subject, he forgets his melancholy. When the players are about to come and he has started thinking of his uncle, then his suspicion of these two returns and he becomes cold and formal and punctiliously polite to them :

“ Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore. Your hands, come ; the appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony : let me comply with you in this garb, lest my extent to the players, which, I tell you, must show fairly outwards, should more appear like entertainment than yours. You are welcome.”

How different is his in tone and language from the first :

“ Good lads, how do ye both.”

He treats them as the King's spies :

“ My uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.”



Then we proceed to the Third Act. The King is careful not to let the two courtiers see that he is not friendly to Hamlet. He merely enquires how far they have succeeded in getting at the root of the Prince's malady. As they are about to leave the stage, Claudius says :

“ Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,  
And drive his purpose on to these delights.”

*Ros.* “ We shall, my lord.”

There is no suggestion that they are privy to the King's plot or even that the King has yet any plot at all. After Hamlet's “ get thee to a nunnery ” interview with Ophelia, Polonius suggests that he should be sent to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not present there.

In the second scene they visit the Prince together with Polonius, but are soon dismissed because Hamlet wants to confer with Horatio, who is not passion's slave. When the King and Queen come and the play is about to begin, it is to Rosencrantz that Hamlet puts the question — “ Be the players ready ? ” During the play they utter no word and can hardly follow the true significance of the scene. As soon as Hamlet finds his own impression confirmed by Horatio, he asks for some music—the recorders—because the load is lighter and with a clear conscience he can punish Claudius. Just then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reappear. Hamlet realises that he must be on his guard in their presence. They had retired with the King and have come from him presumably. Hamlet puts on, therefore, the armour of irony.

“ *Guil.* Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

*Ham.* Sir, a whole history.”



They have been sent by the Queen to him : even so they are suspect.

“ *Ham.* My mother, you say,—

*Ros.* Then thus she says : your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.

*Ham.* O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother ! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother’s admiration ? Impart.”

Just a little before this, nettled over the Prince’s irony, Guildenstern had spoken with impatience :

“ If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother’s commandment ; if not, your pardon and my return shall be the end of my business.”

They are being unjustly suspected and they are honest. Quite naturally they protest and do not see why they should submit to this treatment.

Rosencrantz specially feels this estrangement,

“ My lord, you once did love me.”

But Hamlet’s heart is steeled ;

“ So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.”

It is Guildenstern whom Hamlet tries to win over or at least to persuade to resign the King’s commission.

“ To withdraw with you :—why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil ?

*Guil.* O, my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

*Ham.* I do not well understand that.”

No wonder. He is so hemmed in with foes that he can-



not understand why these two are associating with them if they are not in league with them. He is frankly angry :

“ Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.”

In the Third Scene they are found with the King. What is the nature of the secret which he shares with them?

“ I like him not, nor stands it safe with us,  
To let his madness rage. Therefore prepare you;  
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,  
And he to England shall along with you ;  
The terms of our estate may not endure  
Hazard so near us as doth hourly grow  
Out of his lunacies.”

Then after the two courtiers profess their willingness to obey the King's command, Claudius says :

“ Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage ;  
For we will fetters put upon this fear,  
Which now goes too free-footed.”

All that the King says to them is that he wants them to accompany the Prince in his exile to England. They have seen enough to believe that he is not in his proper senses. He talks in an irresponsible, incoherent fashion. It is well for the state that he should for a while leave it. They do not hesitate to promise :

“ We will haste us.”

What Hamlet thinks of them is clear from his words to his mother at the end of the Third Act. How he has got at the secret we cannot tell. But that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ever knew it the dramatist does not tell us.

“ *Ham.* I must to England ; you know that?



*Queen.* Alack,  
 I had forgot; 'tis so concluded on.  
*Ham.* There's letters seal'd; and my  
two school-fellows,  
 Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd,  
 They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,  
 And marshal me to knavery. Let it work;  
 For 'tis the sport to have the enginer  
 Hoist with his own petar; and 't shall go hard  
 But I will delve one yard below their mines,  
 And blow them at the moon; oh, 'tis most sweet,  
 When in one line two crafts directly meet."

All this is mere suspicion, at least so far as the connivance or participation of his friends is concerned. He already distrusts them and thinks they must be in the know.

In the Fourth Act the two friends come to the King who again gives them no hint of his fell purpose :

"Friends both, go join you with some further aid;  
 Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,  
 And from his mother's closet hath he dragg'd him:  
 Go seek him out ; speak fair, and bring the body  
 Into the chapel."

Rosencrantz goes to Hamlet who talks half wildly and half coherently, again suggesting the distrust with which he now regards him:

"*Ham.* Do not believe it.

*Ros.* Believe what?

*Ham.* That I can keep your counsel and not mine own."

They bring him to the King; there also he talks apparent nonsense and the King announces to him that for his especial safety he should be sent to England. With affected uncon-



cern the Prince walks out. Claudius then says to the two friends:

“ Follow him at foot; tempt him with speed aboard;  
 Delay it not, I'll have him hence tonight ;  
 Away! for everything is seal'd and done,  
 That else leans on the affair: pray you, make haste.”

All very vague, except the command for immediate departure. It is only after they are gone out, and the King is alone that he says referring to England :

“ Thou mayst not coldly set,  
 Our sovereign process; which imports at full,  
 By letters conjuring to that effect,  
 The present death of Hamlet.”

For the first time is this disclosed : Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never learn of it at all.

We hear next of these two ill-starred friends in Hamlet's letter to Horatio in Act IV. Sc. vii :

“ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course  
 for England; of them I have much to tell thee.”

In Act V. Sc. ii, Hamlet relates the incidents to Horatio :

“ Up from my cabin,  
 My sea-gown scarf'd about me, in the dark  
 Groped I to find out them ; had my desire,  
 Finger'd their packet, and in fine withdrew,  
 To mine own room again ; making so bold,  
 My fears forgetting manners, to unseal  
 Their grand commission ; where I found,

Horatio,—

O royal knavery !— . . . . .

An earnest conjuration from the King,

. . . . .  
 That, on the view and knowing of these contents,



Without debatement further, more or less,  
 He should the bearers put to sudden death,  
 Not shriving-time allow'd. . . . .

*Horatio.* So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

*Ham.* Why, man, they did make love to this employment :

They are not near my conscience ; their defeat  
 Does by their own insinuation grow."

And that is their sole epitaph : " they are not near my conscience."

When we talk of Shakespcarean tragedy, we are apt to concentrate on the hero, or if we glance beyond him we are arrested by the vision of those near to him. We mourn the sad end of Ophelia and are shocked at the murder of Polonius. We pity the Queen and are not sorry when Claudius is stabbed. The death of Laertes also moves us. But who ever thinks of the two poor, misunderstood, blundering, faithful friends? That Hamlet does not feel his conscience hurt is not surprising : Bacon quotes Duke Cœsmus as saying, " You never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends." But, so anxious himself not to be misjudged, Hamlet has misjudged them. They are not of the class to which Horatio and Kent belong ; the heroic fidelity of the scholar and the banished earl is not theirs ; nor the lifelong loyalty of Adam. It is not suggested that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are cast in that mould. They are insignificant characters, but they are not vile or false. To their Prince, their old companion, they are helpful and friendly ; to their monarch, they are loyal and obedient. That they die an undeserved death does not stir us because of so many other deaths. But it is none the less calculated to add to that sense of ruin and waste which the tragedy produces.



## THE MONOSYLLABLE IN SHAKESPEARE

(Whenever the situation demands emphasis, Shakespeare uses a large number of monosyllabic words. Whether in tense moments, or in a state of emotional excitement, his characters seem invariably to employ monosyllables in their speech. There are so many examples of this, and in so many plays of every period of his dramatic career, that they cannot have been due to chance.) In this paper an attempt will be made to deduce the principles on which Shakespeare based his practice. That there was some principle admits, I submit, of no question. It will appear at the end of the paper that art had a not inconsiderable share in the work of the Master.

### THE TWELFTH NIGHT

X 1. The love-sick Orsino, in love with love and with himself, calls for music. His mind is full of sweet thoughts mixed with a tender melancholy. He recalls the notes that he has heard and associates the sweetness of sound with the sweetness of smell :

“ That strain again ; it had a dying fall ;  
O, it came o’er my ear like the sweet south,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing, and giving odour.”

21 monosyllabic words out of 29.

2. Asked by the Duke about her father’s daughter’s history, Viola replies :

“ A blank, my lord. She never told her love—”

Eight monosyllables in a line of nine words. While



she is stating this bare fact—full of the feeling which she seeks to conceal—she uses words of one syllable. After the confession has forced an utterance, the language can become dignified and can employ the simile of the worm in the bud, feeding on the damask cheek. When pressed to say if her sister died of love, Viola in her confusion cannot summon many words to her aid and can only stammer :

“ I am all the daughters of my father’s house,  
And all the brothers too;—and yet I know  
not;—”

All words of one syllable, save ‘ daughters,’ ‘ fathers,’ and ‘ brothers.’

3. In the Fourth Act, the bewildered Sebastian, agreeably surprised at the kindness of Olivia, says :

“ This pearl she gave me, I do feel’t and see’t ;  
And though ’tis wonder that enwraps me thus,  
Yet ’tis not madness.”

Three dissyllabic words, and twenty of one syllable.

4. When the tangle caused by the resemblance of Viola and Sebastian is solved, and the pent-up feelings of the former can now be frankly expressed, she does not have recourse to learned allusions and ponderous phrases, but to such words as are on all lips and come readily to all : “ Where goes Cesario? ” asks Olivia, and Viola exuberantly answers :

“ After him I love  
More than I love these eyes, more than my life,  
More, by all mores, than e’er I shall love wife.”

Except ‘ after ’ every word is of one syllable : twenty-three of them could not have come together by mere accident.



## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

1. Theseus is impatient with the slowness of time, and is full of eager anticipations. His nuptial hour will unite him to her whom he has won after heroic exploits :

“ Four happy days bring in  
Another moon ; but oh, methinks, how slow  
This old moon wanes.”

This is not his usual style. He speaks in his normal manner when he says :

“ Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires,  
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,  
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,  
You can endure the livery of a nun.”

But when he is much moved he employs the style of the first passage.

2. When Shakespeare is merely poetical, expressing some pretty fancy, he does not need monosyllables. Any words that come to him are used :

“ I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows ;  
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows ;  
Quite over-canopied with lush woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.”

In such pieces of pastoral description he is content with the language of convention. But when, in the Second Act, Hermia gets up, and half-sleeping, half-awake, relates her dream, the monosyllables come :

“ Ah me, for pity—what a dream was here !  
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear !  
Methought a serpent eat my heart away,  
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.”—

very  
good



3. Or when Helena is in a reminiscent mood and describes their school-life, whilst she is highly-wrought she uses a large number of monosyllabic words :

“ So we grew together,  
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted.”

And yet this is not a remarkable passage because the subject is a well-worn one.

4. Titania is deeply enamoured of Bottom's note, and her eye enthralled to his shape. And the stolid artisan accepts the situation with great wisdom. When he wakes up from his sleep, and ponders over what he has dreamt, he does not know what to make of it. Was it all a mere vision, or was it real? Real or false, he will carry with him a rich memory ; real or false, he will, in his own estimation at least, be removed and elevated for evermore above his fellows. He is in raptures over his recollection. Life will henceforth be sweeter because of this experience; because of this he will forswear the use of garlic, he will put new strings to his pumps, use clean linen and pare his nails. He will be worthy of his dream. For him it is a great moment, and his speech is appropriate to it :

“ I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream—past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had,—But man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen ; man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive ; nor his heart to report what my dream was.”

Six words of two syllables, and eighty-five of one syllable!



## ROMEO AND JULIET.

1. In the Second Act, before Age has time to interfere with the plans of Youth, in the sudden revelation of passion, with the conscious power of eternal love, Romeo comes to Capulet's garden, sees a light break through Juliet's window, and as he recognises her, exclaims :

“ It is my lady ; O, it is my love!

O, that she knew she were!—

She speaks, yet she says nothing : what of that?”

2. The boundless, exuberant passion of youth finds expression in Juliet's words :

“ Come, gentle night,—come, loving black-brow'd  
night,

Give me my Romeo ; and, when he shall die,

Take him and cut him out in little stars,

And he will make the face of heaven so fine

That all the world will be in love with night.”

Forty-two monosyllables out of a total forty-six words.

3. “ Thy drugs are quick.—Thus with a kiss I die.”

With monosyllables on his lips.

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

1. The play begins with the words of the puzzled Antonio. He has often pondered on the subject of his causeless melancholy, and has not found yet an explanation :

“ In sooth, I know not why I am so sad ;

It wearies me ; you say it wearies you ;

But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,

What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,

I am to learn.”



2. When Shylock sees Antonio, his long-repressed hatred finds expression in the grim vow :

“ If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.”

Two words only that are not monosyllabic.

3. Portia uses dignified and stilted language when she preaches to Shylock about the quality of mercy ; words that are of considerable length :

“ The quality of mercy is not strained ;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,  
Upon the place beneath . . . . .  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown ;  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power ;  
The attribute to awe and majesty . . . . .”

But when, after the strain of the trial is over, and she can feel the reaction from the tense atmosphere of the court, her style alters :

“ I pray you, know me when we meet again ;  
I wish you well, and so I take my leave.”

All monosyllables but one.

4. In that lyric interlude, the Fifth Act, Jessica and Lorenzo lose themselves completely in the poetry of night and moonlight :

“ How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon the bank!  
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears ; soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.”

The first three lines which express personal feeling are predominantly monosyllabic,—the rest lapses into the words of convention.



## AS YOU LIKE IT. ✓

( There are not many tense moments in this pleasant and cultivated romance : indeed, the sinister background almost completely fades after the opening scenes, and the kingdom of light imaginings comes. Where all is laughter and fun, the depths are not stirred, and so of monosyllabic passages in this play the number is small. But to begin with, as love comes at first sight, Rosalind says :

“ He calls us back ; my pride fell with my fortunes ;  
I’ll ask him what he would.—Did you call, sir?—  
Sir, you have wrestled well.”

## JULIUS CAESAR.

1. This is the first great tragedy and its technique is therefore of special interest, the first serious clash between rival forces, between duty and love, public responsibility and personal friendship. Gone are the light banter and gaiety of the early plays. Here passion runs high, and calculation and reason and humour occupy a secondary place. Brutus murders Cæsar, in cold blood, for no personal gain. He murders his friend : he feels for the dead comrade, and he has to pacify the crowd. None but monosyllabic words will serve his end :

“ Who is here so base that would be a bondman?  
If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who  
is here so rude that would not be a Roman?  
If any, speak ; for him have I offended. Who  
is here so vile that will not love his country?  
If any, speak ; for him have I offended. I  
pause for a reply. . . . .

Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony :  
who, though he had no hand in his death, shall  
receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the



commonwealth as which of you shall not?  
 With this I depart : that, as I slew my best  
 lover for the good of Rome, I have the same  
 dagger for myself, when it shall please my  
 country to need my death."

129 words out of which more than 100 are monosyllabic.

2. On the plains of Philippi we find him bidding a warm farewell to Cassius :

" For ever, and for ever, farewell, Cassius !  
 If we do meet again, why, we shall smile ;  
 If not, why, then, this parting was well made.  
 O, that a man might know  
 The end of this day's business ere it come!  
 But it sufficeth that the day will end,  
 And then the end is known!"

Forty-six monosyllables.)

#### HAMLET. ✓

On the person of the Prince of Denmark Shakespeare has lavished all the gifts he could : he was a perfect courtier, soldier and scholar. He was also a perfect lover, and a master of expression. There is hardly an important speech of his which is not characterised by a fondness for monosyllables.

1. His first words in the play are :

" A little more than kin and less than kind."

His second speech is :

" Not so, my lord ; I am too much i' the sun."

Only monosyllabic words : he is depressed and pre-occupied with the thought of his father's sad death.



2. "To die,—to sleep;—

To sleep! perchance to dream :—ay, there's  
the rub;

For in that sleep of death what dreams may  
come,

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause."

Here every word is weighed : monosyllables are used not because of excess of passion, but because of slowness and sureness of deliberation, of careful thinking, and of a desire to use only the inevitable words.

3. Hamlet makes to Horatio the confession of his warm regard in the words :

"Give me that man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee."

One word only, in this sincere outburst, which is not monosyllabic.

4. When Ophelia comes and utters 'the document in madness,' and turns to favour and to prettiness thought and affliction, passion, hell itself, she says:

"There's rue for you ; and here's is some for me ;  
we may call it herb-grace o' Sundays :—O,  
you must wear your rue with a difference.—  
There's a daisy :—I would give you some violets  
but they withered all when my father died :—  
they say he made a good end."

Fifty-four words, of which forty-seven are monosyllabic.



5. After the dread massacre and waste of the final Act, anxious that he should be understood aright, Hamlet says:

“ I am dead, Horatio.—Wretched queen, adieu !  
 You that look pale and tremble at this chance,  
 That are but mates or audience to this act,  
 Had I but time,—as this fell sergeant, death,  
 Is strict in his arrest,—O, I could tell you,—  
 But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead ;  
 Thou liv’st ; report me and my cause aright  
 To the unsatisfied.”

The full pathos of “ O, I could tell you,—but let it be.—Horatio I am dead ”—can be realised and felt if we recall how eager the Prince has been that he should be understood aright. His own lips are dry and energy fast ebbing, and he makes a last solemn appeal:

“ If thou didst ever hold me in my heart,  
 Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,  
 To tell my story”—

Twenty-three words of one syllable.

6. Hamlet’s death moves Horatio who is not passion’s slave—as few things can. He is to absent himself from felicity ‘ awhile ’ : so he will not bid him farewell, only ‘ goodnight ’ :

“ Now cracks a noble heart.—Goodnight, sweet  
prince,  
 And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest ! ”



## OTHELLO.

Iago in this play is intellect devoid of feeling. Every word that he utters conceals careful plotting and cunning. He cannot, therefore, for all his plausibility, use the accents of sincerity; the effectiveness of the monosyllabic style is not at his command. He can employ only the pompous language of convention :

“ You shall mark  
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave  
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,  
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,  
For naught but provender ; and when he's old,  
cashiered.”

1. But whenever the noble Moor is stirred, he who loves with all the fervour of his heart and is eloquent in his very simplicity, his style is like the normal Shakespearean style when passion is the great argument :

“ Rude am I in my speech,  
And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace ;  
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,  
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd  
Their dearest action in the tented field.”

The last line excepted, monosyllables predominate the passage.

2. After Iago has succeeded in planting in his mind the seeds of suspicion, Othello replies, counterfeiting calmness which covers frantic emotion :

“ Look here, Iago ;  
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven:  
'Tis gone.”



3. In the Fifth Act, suffering under the influence of the green-eyed monster, his soul on the rack, torn between love and doubt, Othello says to himself :

“ It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—  
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars !—  
It is the cause.—Yet I’ll not shed her blood ” ;—

No word of more than one syllable.

Then a moment later,

“ When I have pluck’d thy rose,  
I cannot give it vital growth again,  
It needs must wither. I’ll smell it on the tree.”

4. Iago succeeds up to a point and then finds his craftily-reared structure crumbling to pieces. Even he is aroused—but only to greater determination :

“ Demand me nothing ; what you know, you know ;  
From this time forth I never will speak word.”

Except three words, all the others are monosyllabic.

5. Othello’s farewell—

“ Soft you, a word or two before you go.  
I have done the state some service, and they know’t;  
No more of that.—I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am.”

#### KING LEAR.

1. The old king receives a shock on hearing Cordelia’s reply and says :

“ I loved her most, and thought to set my rest  
On her kind nursery.”



2. When he is turned out of doors by his ungrateful daughters and the presage of insanity is felt by him, Lear exclaims:

“ O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven,  
Keep me in temper, I would not be mad ! ”

3. When Edgar sees the king, singing aloud, crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds, he says :

“ I would not take this from report ;—it is,  
And my heart breaks at it.”

4. Lear asks for surgeons; he is cut to the brains, and after the physicians have treated him, and Cordelia spoken to him, he cries :

“ Pray, do not mock me ;  
I am a very foolish, fond old man,  
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less ;  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.”

5. Edmund sees Lear and Cordelia brought as prisoners and Lear says to Cordelia :

“ Come, let's away to prison :  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage ;  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down  
And ask of thee forgiveness : so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies.”

In this passage of six lines there are but six words that are not monosyllabic.



6. Finally there is the passage uttered by Kent—Shakespeare's supreme achievement in the use of monosyllables :

“ Vex not his ghost : O, let him pass, he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this rough world  
Stretch him out longer.”

### MACBETH.

1. Macbeth's first words are :

“ So foul and fair a day I have not seen.”

But when he meditates on the consequences of his deed and thinks of the dread hereafter, his language becomes an echo of his fright :

“ But in these cases,  
We still have judgment here ; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague th' inventor : this even-handed justice  
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips . . . . Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that is virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off ;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, tōss'd  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind.”

Here is a passage with a multitude of long words. The speaker is terrified and we are also struck with awe.



2. The murder is done ; and Macbeth has come, dazed and horrified, out of Duncan's chamber. He has murdered sleep, and peace and happiness will now be no more for him. He says to his wife :

“ I'll go no more :  
I am afraid to think what I have done ;  
Look on't again I dare not.”

This comes from the depth of his heart, and there are in the three lines only two dissyllabic words.

CYMBELINE.

1. In this semi-tragic play there are several tense situations. One of the most piquant is that in the Third Act when Imogen receives Posthumus' letter and prepares to go to Milford-Haven. She is greatly excited and looks forward with great eagerness to meeting her lord :

“ O for a horse with wings !—Hear'st thou,  
Pisanio?  
He is at Milford-Haven ; read, and tell me  
How far 'tis thither. If one of mean affairs  
May plod it in a week, why may not I  
Glide thither in a day?—Then, true Pisanio,—  
Who long'st, like me, to see thy lord ;  
who long'st—  
O, let me 'bate—but not like me ; yet long'st,  
But in a fainter kind ; O, not like me ;  
For mine's beyond beyond ”—

Except for the proper names, there are only six words in these nine lines which are not monosyllables.



## THE TEMPEST.

1. In the strange magic atmosphere in which Ferdinand meets Miranda and promises that he loves, prizes and honours her beyond all limit of the world, the maiden is struck dumb, her heart is full and she can only fall back on monosyllables :

“ I am a fool  
To weep at what I am glad of.”

2. The wise Prospero, in the Fourth Act, sums up his life's philosophy in a sentence that contains only one word that is not monosyllabic :

“ We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.”

It is not in a dogmatic spirit that it is suggested that in the above examples monosyllabic words have been purposely used in order to make the passages effective. This device has been learnt from the Master by only one other—A. E. Housman. How much his quiet, thoughtful, well-controlled, melancholy philosophy owes to this it is difficult to estimate ; that it adds to the impressiveness of his verse admits of no doubt.

*two and two are four,  
three and three are five,  
four and four are seven,  
five and five are ten.  
How long has it been  
since I was a boy?*

“ Oh lad, I fear that yon's the sea  
Where they fished for you and me,  
And there, from whence we both were ta'en,  
You and I shall drown again.”

“ So here are things to think on  
That ought to make me brave,  
As I strap on for fighting  
My sword that will not save.”

*BRAND*



“ But men at whiles are sober  
And think by fits and starts,  
And if they think, they fasten  
Their hands upon their hearts.”

This is well-thought out and deliberate. Where Shakespeare is expressing a trite thought he does not worry about language ; where he makes his character specially dignified and pompous, the style reflects it. When Macbeth is impressed with the magnitude of his deed, his language is :

“ No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.”

But when he speaks his heart and is not a king or a murderer, but a primal man, speaking the elemental thoughts, he says :

“ I have liv'd long enough : my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf.”

This, then, is the theory : conventional language for conventional thought, but mainly monosyllabic words for the expression of real and deep feeling, whether uttered with slow deliberation or in an outburst without restraint.

*Note.*—In fairness to Mr. A. E. Housman I should state that he has written to me to say : “ I in the verses you quote from me did not aim at using them (monosyllables).”

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## SHAKESPEARE AND SLEEP

Some years ago I ventured to make an observation on the subject of sleep to which one journal took strong exception. I had suggested that there are so many passages in Shakespeare on this subject that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he must have often thought about it. The general tone of the passages is such as to indicate that he thought of it with much wistfulness and melancholy. It is true, of course, that on the application of views expressed in the plays to the personality of Shakespeare, one must speak with great hesitation and trepidation. The temptation to see the man in an image of our own creation is great, and one cannot afford to be dogmatic. It seems quite likely, however, that on this subject of sleep and the want of it, Shakespeare either in his own person or in that of some friend was much touched. He has several very feeling passages on it. Indeed, some of them seem a little uncalled for, if not irrelevant. The subject was such an obsession with him that he hardly ever resisted it.

### ROMEO AND JULIET

Act II, Sc. ii.—In the scene of rapture, of the love that is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden, too like the lightning, Juliet says to the lover the discovery of whose affection has acted like wine,

“ Good night, Good night ! as sweet repose and rest  
Come to thy heart, as that within my breast.”

Surely, this is a little curious. Love should make them restless, whether in meditation or in imagination ; they



should be dreaming of the great bliss that has come to them. Instead, as though this were the greatest of all blessings, Juliet wishes her Romeo, 'sweet repose and rest.' The loss of this must have been felt to be a cruel hardship, hence the wish.

As the lovers part, and Romeo wishes he were Juliet's bird, and Juliet bids him good night, his fondest prayer, uttered in deep sincerity, is :

"Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast,  
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest."

The lover of Tennyson's *Miller's Daughter* wanted to be the jewel that trembles at her ear, the girdle about her dainty waist, the necklace upon her balmy bosom, but Romeo would be content if he were sleep and peace.

#### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Lysander and Hermia have wandered into the enchanted woods beyond Athens, where the Fairies come and also the rude artisans of England, and they are tired and long for rest, such as becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid. Lysander, who 'riddles very prettily,' finds a suitable spot for his bed and says to Hermia :

"Sleep give thee all his rest !"

This is a boon so glorious that Hermia will be happy to wish him even half of it :

"With half that wish the wisher's eyes be prest."

Demetrius, exhausted from the pursuit of Hermia, settles down to sleep and thus expresses himself in quaint conceit :

"So sorrow's heaviness doth heavier grow  
For debt that bankrupt sleep doth sorrow owe ;  
Which now in some slight measure it will pay,  
If for his tender here I make some stay."



Act III, Sc. ii.—Lysander and Demetrius separately lie down to sleep ; they are followed by Helena, who is tired, dispirited and weary. For her, sleep will mean an escape from depression ; for a while at least, it will bring her oblivion ; she can forget her mocking rival Hermia and the disdainful Demetrius ;

“ And sleep, that sometimes shuts up sorrow’s eye,  
Steal me awhile from my own company.”

### THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

Act V, Sc. i.—Adriana tells the Abbess of the trouble she has been having with Antipholus of Syracuse, and the wise Abbess—wise, among other things, on the subject of sleep also—replies :

“ It seems, his sleeps were hindered by thy railing,  
And thereof comes it that his head is light.”

She speaks too of ‘ life preserving rest.’

### RICHARD II

Act I, Sc. iii.—Bolingbroke and Norfolk are about to fight, the cause has been announced, the heralds have made proclamation. The King however throws his warder down, the fight is suspended, and he sends for both the combatants. It is the image of sleep which he summons to influence the two Dukes ; it is their pride, he says, which makes them wake the peace

“ Which in our country’s cradle,  
Draws the sweet infant breath of gentle sleep.”

### (i) HENRY IV

Act III, Sc. ii.—Glendower explains to Mortimer what his wife says to him in Welsh :



“ She bids you on the wanton rushes lay you down,  
 And rest your gentle head upon her lap,  
 And she will sing the song that pleaseth you,  
 And on your eyelids crown the god of sleep,  
 Charming your blood with pleasing heaviness.”

(ii) HENRY IV

Act III, Sc. i.—One of the most poignant passages on the subject of sleep, one which cannot have been created by imagination solely, and one every syllable of which breathes the note of earnestness, is that in which the tired and exhausted King addresses sleep, now in bitter reproach, again in terms of fond appeal :

“ How many thousand of my poorest subjects  
 Are at this hour asleep !—O sleep ! O gentle sleep!  
 Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,  
 That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,  
 And steep my senses in forgetfulness?  
 Why rather, sleep, liest thou in smoky cribs,  
 Upon uneasy pallets stretching thee,  
 And hush’d with buzzing night-flies to thy  
slumber,  
 Than in the perfum’d chambers of the great,  
 Under the canopies of costly state,  
 And lull’d with sounds of sweetest melody?  
 O thou dull god ! why liest thou with the vile,  
 In loathsome beds, and leav’st the kingly couch,  
 A watch—case or a common ’larum bell?  
 Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
 Seal up the ship-boy’s eyes, and rock his brains  
 In cradle of the rude imperious surge,  
 And in the visitation of the winds,  
 Who take the ruffian billows by the top,



Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them  
 With deaf'ning clamours in the slippery clouds,  
 That with the hurly death itself awakes?  
 Canst thou, O partial sleep, give thy repose  
 To the wet sea-boy in an hour so rude ;  
 And in the calmest and most stillest night,  
 With all appliances and means to boot,  
 Deny it to a King? Then, happy low, lie down." )

Act. IV, Sc. iv.—Thoughts very similar to the above occur to the young prince Harry. That Shakespeare thought often in this wise is suggested by this coincidence of both the sick King nearing his end and the young Prince at the height of his prosperity and powers, expressing identical sentiments about sleep. For what does the young scapegrace of Wales know yet of the woes of sleeplessness ; he, the boon companion of Poins, who can out-Falstaff Falstaff in the use of choice terms of abuse, who has regarded fun and jollity as the main business of life, what does he know of it? Yet so full was the poet of the idea that he makes Harry say to the crown that lay on the pillow :

“ O polished perturbation ! golden care !  
 That keepst the ports of slumber open wide  
 To many a watchful night !—sleep with it now?  
 Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet,  
 As he, whose brow with homely biggin bound,  
 Snores out the watch of night.

#### MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Act. III, Sc. i.—The Duke, as a Friar, visits the woe begone Claudius in prison and in course of his sententious



address, observes, using an idea which is used in *Hamlet* also :

“ Thy best of rest is sleep,  
And that thou oft provok'st ; yet grossly fearst  
Thy death, which is no more.”

### HAMLET

Act. III, Sc. i.—Hamlet has felt from the first that Claudius is to him a little more than kin and less than kind, and that he himself is too much in the sun. Then the ghost makes startling revelations to him. The world is turned upside down for him : values shift ; well established notions are exploded. Loyalty, filial love, chastity, not for one of these has he any respect ; he doubts, indeed, their very existence. He has returned all he had taken from others ; he has repudiated Ophelia's love. He is tired of it all ; he is eager to part with life. Then he pauses. Is he sure he will make a better bargain? What does he know of death? Life, he knows, is bad. But death may be worse :

“ To die,—to sleep,  
No more ;—and, by a sleep, to say we end  
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die,—to sleep :—  
To sleep ! perchance to dream ; ay, there's the rub ;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause.”

It is the dreams that disturb sleep which frighten him also ; the dreams which have prevented him from counting himself a King of infinite space even when bounded in a nutshell.



## OTHELLO

Act III, Sc. ii.—Iago's plan works apace, and Cassio has been disgraced. "Never more be officer of mine," Othello tells him. Then the General turns to the others who have been disturbed by the midnight brawl. They are soldiers and must submit to hardships. The greatest of these hardships is disturbed sleep—

" 'Tis the soldiers' life

To have their balmy slumbers wak'd with strife."

Act III, Sc. iii.—Iago has poured the poison of jealousy into the ears of Othello even while warning him against the green-ey'd monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on. "The Moor already changes with my poison," gloats Iago. All his hatred, malignity, jealousy is gathering to a head. When Othello comes away from the dinner, moody, agitated, bewildered, uncertain, 'honest' Iago's feelings, after a fifth distillation, find expression in the following words :

" Not poppy, nor mandragora

Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,

Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep

Which thou ow'dst yesterday."

This is the greatest of curses, this is the worst ill Iago can wish to Othello. He relishes the prospect, enjoys uttering every syllable of the words 'mandragora' and 'drowsy syrups,' and anticipates the liveliest satisfaction.

## MACBETH

Act II, Sc. i.—Macbeth enumerates the horrors of the night : the first of these is

" Wicked dreams abuse

The curtain'd sleep."



Act II, Sc. ii.—Macbeth relates to his wife the murder-scene. He is unnerved : he is worried for he has not been able to say ‘ amen ’ to the warder’s ‘ God bless us.’

“ Methought, I heard a voice cry, ‘ sleep no more !  
Macbeth does murder sleep,’—the innocent sleep ;  
Sleep, that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast ;—

*Lady Macbeth.*

What do you mean ?

*Macbeth.* Still it cried, “ Sleep no more ” to all  
the house ;  
Glamis hath murder’d sleep, and therefore  
Cawdor

Shall sleep no more

Macbeth shall sleep no more ! ”

As Macbeth mentions sleep, he thinks of it lovingly, fondly remembering all it does—its ability to destroy care, to provide rest after labour, refreshment after hurt, and then realises with horror that he has murdered this sleep, that it is no longer to visit his eyelids, that he is to be deprived for ever from its blessings. He is to be deprived of them not as one individual, but as Glamis, Cawdor and Macbeth. It is a triple curse, and it is fulfilled in ample measure. For not only he, but Lady Macbeth also suffers from it.

Act V, Sc. i.—Shakespeare intends to arouse our sense of pity and terror. Macbeth may have supped full of horror : but it is his wife whose suffering is displayed to us. She is a pitiable and tragic figure, and the main point is that she walks in sleep : she suffers, as the doctor says, this slumbry agitation. She speaks things which it were not good to hear ; words are rung out of her deep des-



pair and contrition and grief and desolation. She leaves the stage on which this is her last appearance with the words—"To bed, to bed, to bed."

### CYMBELINE

Act V, Sc. iv.—Posthumus is in prison. There is a masque and Posthumus sees the apparition as in a dream. As he wakes up, he exclaims :

"Sleep, thou hast been a grandsire, and begot  
A father to me ; and thou hast created  
A mother, and two brothers."

### THE WINTER'S TALE

Act II, Sc. iii.—Leontes says of the boy how deeply he has taken to heart the dishonour of his mother, and as though loss of sleep were the greatest of misfortunes, goes on,

"Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,  
And downright languish'd."

Then comes Paulina and announces :

"I come to bring him sleep.....I  
Do come with words as med'cinal as true,  
Honest as either, to purge him of that humour,  
That presses him from sleep."

### THE TEMPEST

Act II, Sc. i.—It is after Ariel's visit and the playing of the solemn music, Alonzo, Sebastian and Antonio see that all the others are feeling a disposition to sleep. Then ensues this conversation :

*Alon.* "What ! all so soon asleep ? I wish mine eyes







## SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF MADNESS\*

( 1 )

† In a passage with which you are all thoroughly familiar, Shakespeare mentions the poet, the lover and the lunatic as belonging to the same class. Have you ever asked what position the great dramatist assigns to lunacy in the scheme of life? Has it ever occurred to you to examine in what light he regards lunacy and the lunatics? A very distinguished friend of mine once kept an audience of undergraduates—and I know no more critical audience—entranced for over an hour by a discourse on the theme that all great work of art has been—and can only be—produced when the clinical thermometer registers temperature above normal. When blood courses feverishly through the veins and the pulse-beat is rapid, and the temples are burning and the eyes red and lips parched—then only, he insisted, can really abiding work be produced. From fever health; from the heat of the brain the light of wisdom; from excitement calm. But insanity is much more serious. Everyone has experience of fever; like love and the small-pox, it is inevitable. Insanity we fear; perhaps from the instinct of self-preservation, from incomplete knowledge of its ways, from the comparative rarity of its manifestation, we do not think of it except in terms of fear and perhaps of awe. It is so difficult to comprehend; and so much more difficult to explain. How can we employ lucid expressions for a thing that is not itself lucid? We have not understood it: how can we state it?

Why, then, does Shakespeare speak so confidently of the lunatic? He had been a passionate lover and was a ?

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\* Some portions of this paper were addressed to an audience; the lecture frame-work has been allowed to continue.



great poet. But what did he know of lunatics? Had he studied them in a mental hospital? Was he a medico-psychologist? Did he know anything of Jung and Freud? If not, how dared he speak of the psychology of lunacy? But does he, indeed, seek to explain it? Does any of his characters explain it? Even Polonius, that all-knowing, sapient old gentleman, who swears he uses no art at all and immediately employs 'a foolish figure,' and who declares that brevity is the soul of wit, even he hesitates to be dogmatic :

“ For, to define true madness,

What is't, but to be nothing else but mad? ”

We are vouchsafed nothing more direct, nothing more definite. If it does not satisfy us, Shakespeare at least will not worry. Of what else does he give a definition? Of happiness ; of tragedy ; of love ; of friendship—of which of these can we discover a simple statement in his pages? He was not writing a treatise ; he was not submitting a thesis for a research degree ! He was holding the mirror up to nature ; and mirrors do not speak : they merely reflect. And of the reflections of madness, as indeed of every variety of mental experience, we have many examples in Shakespeare. Let us go through these, and enjoy the comforting thought that we ourselves are perfectly sane. Perhaps the conviction of our sanity may be an indication to the contrary : but the indication concerns others and may be left unheeded by ourselves.

( 2 )

✓ One view of Shakespearean tragedy is that it is invariably caused by an obsession. There are various contributory causes, but the most important one is the hero's temporary obsession. There are unpropitious circumstances, a combination thoroughly unsuitable, a situation



of an extraordinary character. There are untoward happenings, chance events, unexpected accidents. There are the malign workings of Fate ; the inscrutable machinations of Destiny ; the tortuous influences of the Sisters Three and such other branches of learning. There are supernatural beings, ghosts that with solemn march go stately along in the dead waste and middle of the night, and that have no speculation in those eyes which they do glare with, and witches, juggling fiends that palter with us in a double sense and keep the word of promise to our ear and break it to our hope. There are all these and others, too—weak, innocent, defenceless people ; traitorous and wily villains ; but essentially, it is urged, tragedy is due to the temporary insanity of the hero.x

Mr. Wyndham Lewis, in his *The Lion and the Fox*, states that “ Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Timon are all demented ” ; and again, “ Madness accounts for the nihilism that surges up in every tragedy of Shakespeare, once the characters have become ‘ mad ’ enough with suffering.” If by this, Mr. Lewis implies that the tragedies are abnormal events, and the heroes are abnormal persons, the view is just. The situation is in every case abnormal and the solution is abnormal.x Perhaps this is only the modern and more learned way of paraphrasing the time-honoured view of the hero having a fatal flaw in his character. There is a difference, it is true : ‘ the fatal flaw ’ suggests that it is ingrained in the character, ‘ obsession ’ implies that it is temporary and will pass away. Professor Bradley is not inclined, however, to attach much importance to this : “ Shakespeare occasionally, and for reasons which need not be discussed here, represents abnormal conditions of mind ; insanity, for example, somnambulism, hallucinations. And deeds issuing from these are not what are called deeds in the fullest sense, deeds expressive of



character. No ; but these abnormal conditions are never introduced as the origin of deeds of any dramatic moment." That is, the ' obsession ' or the abnormality is really not of special import : it is purely incidental and secondary. ✓ A recent writer, Dr. Somerville asserts, " the principal characters in Shakespearean tragedy are *all more or less* mad—some more, others less. It is useful to remember, too, that a ' mad ' character is not always mad during the action of the play in which he appears. He is generally quite mad in the end." ✕ I hope you will bear with me while I venture to suggest, with becoming diffidence, my own view.

( 3 )

I shall revert to the tragedies a little later. For the present let us look at madness in the comedies of Shakespeare. ✓ In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* almost every person is mad, ✕ as who is not in midsummer? There is the phrase ' midsummer madness ' ; and when we add to the effects of midsummer the influence of ' this old moon,' like to a silver bow new-bent in heaven, the conditions are thoroughly favourable for lunacy. Egeus is so mad that he solicits the Duke's sanction to Hermia's forced wedding to Demetrius, failing which he asks that she be put to death, " according to our law immediately provided in that case." Demetrius is mad ; he had made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena, and she dotes in idolatry upon him ; but he has turned his affections to Hermia who is all unwilling to give sovereignty to his unwished yoke. Helena is mad with love ; her prayers cannot move Demetrius' affection ; the more she loves the more he hates her ; yet she so loves him to distraction that she will reveal to him the plans of Hermia and for this intelligence



if she have thanks, it is a dear expense. These are the persons that are already mad when the play begins. But there are others who become mad as the play proceeds. These latter lose their sanity because of external causes ; they are made the victims of a practical joke, partly intentional and partly accidental. But the comic side of the whole affair is that the fairies that are responsible for this joke are themselves mad also ! To create mad fairies, fairies subject to the same feelings as men, was no easy matter. But Shakespeare does this as so many another difficult tour de force with the greatest ease. When Oberon and Titania are about to appear, we are told the king is passing fell and wrath : they are both mad with jealousy. The king accuses Titania of having led Theseus through the glimmering night from Peregina whom he ravished. Titania is sure that Oberon has come from the farthest steep of India only because the bouncing Amazon, his buskin'd mistress and his warrior love, is to be wedded to Theseus. Oberon is so beside himself, ' alienated ' with jealousy that he declares, " thou shalt not from this grove till I torment thee for this injury." Then he decides to cause madness. He tells his chosen lieutenant :

" Fetch me that flower ; the herb I show'd thee once ;  
The juice of it, on sleeping eyelids laid,  
Will make a man or woman madly dote  
Upon the next live creature that it sees."

So as he gets the flower he decides to go to the bank where the wild thyme blows and where Titania sleeps : he'll streak her eyes with the juice of this flower. But he will also incidentally do good to a sweet Athenian lady who is in love with a disdainful youth : he desires that he may prove more fond on her than she upon her love. It is after this that midsummer madness has full sway. It is



only for a night, but while it lasts, it is supreme. Puck makes a mistake. He throws upon Lysander's eyes all the power of the charm, and it so happens that the first person he sees on awaking is Helena, transparent Helena, and addresses the love and might of all his powers to honour Helena and to be her knight. Meanwhile, poor Bottom is translated. To reassure himself, to gain confidence, he sings a song. The Fairy Queen wakes up to ask what angel wakes her from her flowery bed. Her ear is much enamour'd of his note and her eye enthralled to his shape. Her madness is complete. She swears she loves him ; she assures him he is as wise as he is beautiful. She will give him fairies to attend on him,

“ And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,  
And sing while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep.”

She considers him to be almost like an airy spirit. She commands the fairies to pluck the wings from painted butterflies to fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes. The jealous Oberon is very pleased : this has fallen out better than he could devise.

Meanwhile Demetrius' eyes are charmed just as Lysander and Helena appear : and as he wakes up, he is mad also, calls Helena goddess, nymph, perfect, divine, describes her lips as kissing cherries, desires to kiss her hand, the princess of pure white, the seal of bliss. No wonder poor Helena is bewildered and angry and runs away. This madness of both the Athenian youths had not been contemplated by Oberon, and he gives to Puck another herb which is to be crushed into Lysander's eye, and which will make his eyeballs roll with wonted sight. This is done and Puck leaves Lysander with the assurance that when he wakes he will take true delight in the sight of his lady's eye. This side of madness comes thus to an



end. But Oberon sees the madness of Titania, sees his Queen coy Bottom's amiable cheeks, and stick musk-roses in his sleek smooth head, and kiss his fair large ears. She falls asleep as she winds him in her arms. Oberon now takes pity on her, and releases her and undoes the hateful imperfection of her eyes. Titania thus gets over her madness, and, once in her true senses, she loathes poor Bottom's visage.

✓ In this comedy madness takes on the whole a funny shape. It is entirely confined to the eyes. The eyes make people mad. Their vision is blurred. They make fantastic mistakes. ✕ They make fools of themselves. We laugh at their mistakes, and we do not take them seriously as we know that in the end they will see aright and forget their temporary insanity. Perhaps the serious suggestion is present in the background, that love is a passion that may lead to dire consequences. But for the present we can afford to laugh at the exhibition of madness.

( 4 )

I shall not advert to the madness of Shylock, caused by the mixed feelings of greed and revenge ✕ a madness that verges on the borders of tragedy ; nor of the madness of Jaques, produced by the sentiment of melancholy ✕ a madness that gives him a distorted view of life and makes him rail against the world. But a word must be said of Malvolio, who is sick of self-love and tastes with a distempered appetite. ✓ As if he were not already mad with self-love, there is a plot to make him so. ✕ In Hamlet we have a person who pretends madness ; in Malvolio one whom others treat as a lunatic. ✕ Mistress Maria plots with Sir Toby to " gull him into a nay-word, and make him a common recreation." He is " the best persuaded of him-



self ; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith that all that look on him love him." This promises 'sport royal.' Malvolio enters the garden in a mood exactly suited to the joke that is to be played on him : " Maria once told me she did affect me ; and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion." " There's example for it ; the lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe." Kalidasa assures us, " Kámi svatám pashyati " ; and Malvolio is so obsessed with his own importance and his future greatness that he pictures himself in a branched velvet gown, having the humour of state and bestowing a demure travel of regard. He will be point-device the very man. Maria's trick works ; he is imposed upon by the letter. He's in yellow stockings and is cross-gartered. Maria goes in advance to Olivia and warns her : " Your ladyship were best to have some guard about you, if he come, for sure the man is tainted in his wits." The rest of the scene must speak for itself :

[ " *Enter Malvolio.*

*Olivia.* How now, Malvolio ?

*Mal.* Sweet lady, ho, ho.

*Oli.* Smil'st thou ?

I sent for thee upon a sad occasion.

*Mal.* Sad, lady ? I could be sad. This does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering ; but what of that ? if it please the eye of one, it is with me as the very true sonnet is, ' Please one, and please all.'

*Oli.* Why, how dost thou, man ?

*Mal.* Not black in my mind, though yellow in my



legs. It did come to his hands, and commands shall be executed : I think we do know the sweet Roman hand.

*Oli.* Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?

*Mal.* To bed? ay, sweet-heart, and I'll come to thee.

*Oli.* God comfort thee ! Why dost thou smile so, and kiss thy hand so oft?

*Mar.* How do you, Malvolio?

*Mal.* At your request ! Yes ; nightingales answer daws.

*Mar.* Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness before my lady ?

*Mal.* ' Be not afraid of greatness ' :—'t was well writ.

*Oli.* What meanest thou by that, Malvolio?

*Mal.* ' Some are born great,'—

*Oli.* Ha?

*Mal.* ' Some achieve greatness,'—

*Oli.* What say'st thou?

*Mal.* ' And some have greatness thrust upon them.'

*Oli.* Heaven restore thee !

*Mal.* ' Remember who commended thy yellow stockings,'—

*Oli.* Thy yellow stockings?

*Mal.* ' And wished to see thee cross-gartered.'

*Oli.* Cross-gartered?

*Mal.* ' Go to, thou art made, if thou desirest to be so ' :—

*Oli.* Am I made?

*Mal.* ' If not, let me see thee a servant still.



*Oli.* Why, this is very midsummer madness.”  
But Malvolio is thoroughly satisfied. “Why, everything adheres together, that no drachm of a scruple, no scruple of a scruple, no obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance.” When Toby and Maria come to him he tells them, “I am not of your element.” Fabian pities him a little, “why, we shall make him mad indeed.” Sir Toby is for carrying the joke farther, “my niece is already in the belief that he’s mad: we may carry it thus, for our pleasure and his penance, till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him ; at which time we will bring the device to the bar, and crown thee for a finder of madmen.” They lock him up in a dark room, and as if that is not enough, they bring the clown who functions as Sir Topas the curate.

“*Clo.* What, ho ! I say.—Peace in this prison.

*Mal.* [Within]—Who calls there?

*Clo.* Sir Topas the curate, who comes to visit Malvolio the lunatic.

*Mal.* Sir Topas, Sir Topas, good Sir Topas, go to my lady.

*Clo.* Out, hyperbolical fiend ! how vexest thou this man ! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?

*Mal.* Sir Topas, never was man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad : they have laid me here in hideous darkness.

*Clo.* Fie, thou dishonest Satau ! I call thee by the most modest terms ; for I am one of those gentle ones that will use the devil himself with courtesy. Sayest thou that house is dark?

*Mal.* As hell, Sir Topas.”

And so on the fun goes on increasing and poor Malvolio’s



distress is so great that he demeans himself so far as to ask the Fool to help him when the latter speaks to him in his own voice—

“ *Mal.* Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle, and pen, ink, and paper. As I am a gentleman I will live to be thankful to thee for’t.

*Clo.* Master Malvolio !

*Mal.* Ay, good fool.

*Clo.* Alas, sir, how fell you besides your five wits?

*Mal.* Fool, there was never man so notoriously abused : I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art.

*Clo.* But as well? then you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool.”

Then he writes a letter to Olivia which is read aloud to her in the Duke’s presence. And when Malvolio is brought there the plot is revealed ; but as Fabian says, it is one that may rather pluck on laughter than revenge.

✓ This madness is not real, except that Malvolio is mad of self-love. There is a plot against him, but it is not one of such seriousness as to alarm us. We are amused,, even though we feel that poor Malvolio is receiving rather cruel treatment. That is sad and this imposed madness contributes to it. But it is of no special importance in the play. ✕

( 5 )

Let us come back to the tragedies, and re-state the tragic problem. ✓ The question suggested is, why do Hamlet and Lear and Othello and Macbeth fail? The fact of their failure is tragedy. They fail because the situation in which they find themselves is peculiar and



demands peculiar gifts in the heroes. These are just the gifts they lack: more, the situation is so extraordinary that they cannot be themselves, they say and do things that misrepresent their real nature, they behave so that they produce a false impression of their character. That is the tragedy: the hero misrepresents himself: that is the principal point. There are others also—the instigation of others, villainy, treachery, ingratitude, murder, and others equally painful. But these are secondary. The hero blunders, through an inherent defect of character, or through an unusual combination of circumstances, or through the intervention of some supernatural agency. The tragedy ceases to depress or dishearten us because we see that before the play ends, the hero invariably realises that he has been blundering, that he has been labouring under an obsession, that he has been ‘possessed.’ Call it obsession, or possession, or madness; the fact is there, that during the interval of the play the hero is not quite his usual self. The others realise it; they are shocked or surprised or bewildered. While the play is in progress, we are worried also; the heart longs to be satisfied that the good man will succeed, that the innocent will not suffer, that the forces of ill will come to naught. But this satisfaction is denied. The hero, who wins our sympathy, acts so that we wonder, and ask how a man so good and kind and generous can be at the same time so cruel and callous and blind. Our sense of correct values is shocked, and we are tempted to revise our ideas of the moral fabric of the world. If the good man can suffer and bring suffering to others; if the villain can triumph and proceed from one success to another; if the lightning strike only the pure, the innocent, and the beautiful; if madness and disease and death visit only the gracious and the wise; if righteousness fail and iniquity flourish—where is there room for the



slightest hope that the world is governed by principles we are taught to regard as right and good and holy? Can we get any encouragement towards honesty and rectitude, fidelity and nobility? These are the questions we ask. And we are reassured before the play comes quite to an end that it is not necessary to despair. True, the good suffer and the innocent come to grief ; true, the evil prosper. But only for a while, only because things have managed to go awry, only because a man has not behaved as he normally would. Disasters multiply because this man is not an ordinary man : he is high-placed ; on his choice depends the safety and the health of the whole state ; he is so situated that his action involves many others. Also we feel the sense of grief poignantly because this man is really noble, has good impulses, honestly tries to do his duty. That in spite of it all, he fails is a great pity. It is tragic that he should fail. But as we lay down the play and think about it, as we emerge from the crowded theatre into the open air, and recall the scenes and the words and the characters, what is our main impression? Undoubtedly, the first feeling is one of pity, of what Prof. Bradley would call 'waste.' Then, perhaps, it will be one of terror. But, in the last analysis, we shall, curiously enough, discover a sense of comfort and solace. This last feeling is produced as we recollect the play in tranquillity. Things had gone wrong, but there was no inevitability about the issue, at any rate in the beginning. If the hero had been his normal self, the tragedy and all that it involves would have been averted. Either the hero states that himself at the end, or some other character who is the hero's foil states it. And we agree that the tragedy has been an exceptional thing, that it need not have happened, and that as it has happened we are sorry but not hopeless. The hero invariably realises at the end that it was possible for events to happen otherwise. His



brains become lucid and his thoughts are clear and he sees what a mess he has made of his own and other people's lives. And we thus emerge from the feverish atmosphere into one more serene and more hopeful. Correct values are restored by the time our retrospect is complete. We breathe freely. God's in his heaven and all will be well again. ) \* — p. 187

## ( 6 )

✕ Let us begin with *Othello*. ✓ *Hamlet* and *Lear* contain of course definite examples of madness, but *Othello* and *Macbeth* have hardly any directly mad characters. ✕ What exactly is the tragedy in *Othello*? What is it that moves pity and terror, what chastens us and produces the sense of tears? The tragic fact is this—that the events are untoward, that good persons undergo much undeserved suffering, that vice seems to flourish. *Othello* is apparently so situated that he must succeed. No element of success seems lacking. He is a brilliant general ; he has made himself indispensable ; the state ' cannot with safety cast him ' ; he is no serf, but he fetches his life and being from men of royal siege. He is simple and guileless ; but that he loves the gentle Desdemona he would not his unhoused free condition put into circumspection and confine for the sea's worth. He is not afraid ; he will not hide himself ; no ; his parts, his title, and his perfect soul shall manifest him rightly. In an emergency the Senate has sent about three several quests to search him out. Signior Brabantio is confident that his is not an idle cause, and that the duke or any of the senators cannot but feel the wrong as it were their own. When *Othello* is charged before the Senate, his reply is manly, as befits one of royal descent. He relates his story with convincing sincerity, the progress



of his courtship, and the supreme miracle of his love. He has won the affections of Desdemona by dwelling on his experiences, the battles, sieges, fortunes that he has passed ; by speaking of most disastrous chances, of moving accidents by flood and field ; by describing his hairbreadth scapes in the imminent deadly breach ; by mentioning the Cannibals and the Anthropophagi. Thus she loved him for the dangers he had passed, and he loves her for she does pity them. The gentle Desdemona confirms the account, and Brabantio reconciles himself to the situation. Othello is happy in the success of his love. Then the Duke commissions him to proceed on a stubborn and boisterous expedition. He is politically fortunate. But yet more fortune comes to him : for Desdemona will accompany him to Cyprus. He trusts her implicitly. ‘ My life upon her faith ! ’ he exclaims in devotion. In Cyprus Othello’s arrival is eagerly expected ; Montano has served him and knows that the man commands like a full soldier. The gentlemen there have nothing but praise for him and joy at his success in achieving a maid that excels the quirks of blazoning pens and in the essential vesture of creation does tire the engineer. Desdemona arrives before her husband. As he comes he addresses her as his soul’s joy, and proceeds to say :

“ If it were now to die,

’Twere now to be most happy.’”

He thinks he has too much of joy, and wishes that his kisses may be the greatest discords that ever their hearts shall make. This is the climax of his good fortune. Hitherto he has been on the crest of the wave of success. Thus far he has been permitted to win everything for which he has striven. Glory, victory, popularity, esteem, love—of all these he has now an ample store. He has realised



all the joys that life can provide. Greater happiness than his is not possible. That is why, unconscious of the tragic irony of his words, he says that he would be most happy if he were now to die. What else in the way of joy or glory or success can life give him? Call no man happy till he be dead, said the Greek dramatist, and the truth of the saying is borne out by the career of Othello. Hitherto he could have regarded his career as almost perfect. He has been through disasters and narrow escapes ; he has had an exciting life full of adventure and enterprise. He has an unrivalled place in the State. He has won the love of the fairest maid in all Venice. What has he lacked? How is his career deficient in anything that makes life worth living? But this is the last of his joys, the final success. Hereafter, pain and jealousy ; hatred and bloodshed ; murder and suicide—these will fill the pages of his history. For many pages there will be no brightness and not a breath of pure air ; page after page will recount the ruin of a soul, the degeneration of a character, the moral decay of a noble mind. Again and again we shall be moved to pity ; we shall shudder and shrink and look pale. Passion is let loose and the forces of evil will have sovereign sway. But not for ever. They will continue long enough, too long, but they will cease. The world is so framed that they cannot triumph for ever. Their reign will be transitory. But why is there this grim interim? Who is responsible for it?

Obviously, only one answer is possible : Othello. We may say what we like of the motiveless malignity of Iago ; we may lament the inactivity of Desdemona ; we may mourn the follies of Cassio ; we may seek to fasten responsibility on the handkerchief. But ultimately we have to regard Othello himself as the principal agent of his woe. Why should that be? How does that happen?



What makes this happy man suddenly decide that he shall forget and forego happiness and drain to the dregs the cup of misery and sorrow? Does he decide upon a course of action with the deliberation of an anchorite, lashing himself into torture, starving his body that his soul may be nourished? We can hardly see any trace of this in the valiant Moor. We have to think of some other explanation. And I believe we can only account for Othello's mysterious and sudden fall, his lapses, his uncontrollable jealousy, his consistency in being inconsistent with his whole character, on the theory that he ceased to think clearly, that he allowed his mind to be obsessed by one idea, that he completely surrendered his judgment to one thought. ✕ For a brief period, but a period long enough for several tragedies, his mind lost its lucidity and was clouded. ✕ He suffered from temporary insanity. ✕ Sir Thomas Browne, himself a distinguished physician, refers, in his "Letter to a Friend," to the fact well-known to medical men of a person suffering from mental trouble in regard to only one subject ; on all other subjects his brain functions normally, but on one he is mad. This is the kind of madness from which Othello, unknown to himself, but thoroughly understood by that master of psychology Iago, suffers.

What is the nature of this madness? Othello, this same psychologist Iago, tells us :

"is of a free and open nature,

That thinks men honest that but seem to be so."

He is very trustful ; he thinks well of everyone. He is of "a constant, loving, noble nature." All at once he changes. He becomes, as Dr. Somerville says, a paranoiac, one suffering from delusional insanity. But it is difficult to follow him when he suggests that if Othello



had lived longer he would have become permanently insane. My view, on the other hand, is that Othello and Shakespeare's other tragic heroes are only temporarily demented. It is during the period of their insanity that tragedies happen ; before the play ends they regain their mental equilibrium and see the havoc they have wrought. That is why Shakespearean tragedy does not create a sense of despair. X In regard to Othello, his lapse from sanity is doubtless temporary, but while it lasts he is not himself. The possibility of this insanity is of course posited in every tragic hero. When Cassio and Montano are involved in a drunken brawl, Othello lets us see how sternly under control he has kept his temper :

“ My blood begins my safer guides to rule ;  
And passion, having my best judgment collied,  
Assays to lead the way.”

He just gives us a glimpse of what can happen. This is the first indication, and we get it because Othello is shocked that of all persons his favourite Cassio should misbehave like this. His bewildered brain that has repressed all passion is exactly the material on which Iago can work ; it is just the soil that is required ; it is about to lose its balance, and Iago weights the scale on the side of insanity. He suggests thoughts of jealousy to the constant, loving and noble Moor. But Desdemona can keep him yet a little while on her side : “ I will deny thee nothing,” says Othello, and Desdemona departs happy. But Iago is still present, and Iago torments him and plants the seeds of jealousy in his mind. Henceforward he knows no peace and will commit blunder after blunder. The devil of suspicion will now work apace. As Iago departs, Othello says to himself :

“ Why did I marry ?—This honest creature doubtless



sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.”

He broods over this : this thought occupies his mind to the exclusion of all others. He looks at it from all points of view. He was of a free and open nature ; now he is secretive, he resorts to stratagems. He decides what he will do if she is false. Only after he has decided this does he proceed to enquire why she should be false :

“ If I do prove her haggard,  
Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings,  
I’d whistle her off, and let her down the wind  
To prey at fortune.”

He is on the rack. He has made no enquiry. He jumps to the conclusion that Desdemona must be false.

“ What sense had I of her stol’n hours of lust ? ”

For a moment he sees clearly what will happen to him once he yields to this feeling of jealousy :

“ O, now for ever  
Farewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content !  
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars  
That make ambition virtue ! O, farewell !  
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner, and all quality,  
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war ! ”

He will, he realises, be for ever different from what he has been, and much worse. But even at the moment of realisation he yields to passion, turns to Iago, takes him by the throat and exclaims, “ Villain, be sure then prove my love a whore ; be sure ; give me the ocular proof.” He



seeks to escape from his obsession by violent speech. The process leading to insanity can be traced in his words :

“ By the world,  
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not ;  
I think that thou art just, and think thou  
art not.”

As Iago invents proof after proof, Othello becomes more and more mad, until he says : “ I’ll tear her all to pieces.” Surely, he must be insane. Of Cassio whom he loves he is now prepared to credit the worst faults : “ O, that the slave had forty thousand lives,—one is too poor, too weak for my vengeance.” He swears vengeance and tells Iago that within three days Cassio should be killed. When he talks to Desdemona under this influence, she says to Emilia :

“ I ne’er saw this before.

Sure there’s some wonder in this handkerchief.”

She says again to Cassio :

“ My lord is not my lord ; nor should I know him  
Were he in favour as in humour alter’d.”

She suggests that something of state, some conspiracy has puddled his clear spirit. That his spirit is indeed greatly disturbed, that his control over his mind is gone, is clear from the words he utters before he falls down on the ground in a trance :

“ Lie with her ! lie on her !—we say lie on her  
when they belie her.—Lie with her ! that’s  
fulsome.— —Handkerchief,—confessions,—hand-  
kerchief !—To confess, and be hanged for his  
labour ;—first to be hanged, and then to confess.—  
I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself



in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus :—  
pish !—noses, ears, and lips.—Is't possible?—  
Confess,—handkerchief !—O devil !—

*(Falls in a trance.)*

There can hardly be any doubt that when he regains consciousness he is still and even more demented. He says to Iago :

“ Dost thou hear, Iago ?

I will be found most cunning in my patience ;  
But,—dost thou hear ?—most bloody.”

He declares he would have Cassio nine years a-killing. As to Desdemona—“ let her rot, and perish, and be damned.” Then the thought of his love for her comes for a moment—“ O, the world hath not a sweeter creature : she might lie by an emperor's side, and command him tasks.” He is sorry for her—“ but yet the pity of it, Iago ! O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago ! ” Lest Othello's compassion should make him relent, lest his free and open nature should reassert itself, Iago goads him on to say—“ I will chop her into messes.” Like a mad man he dreads the return of sanity. So he will hurry on ; he will not permit the arrival of a lucid moment.

“ Get me some poison, Iago ; this night.—I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again :—this night, Iago.”

He wants purposely to keep himself in a rage. The arrival of the packet from Venice helps him to keep up his fury. He misunderstands every word that Desdemona utters : he is mad also at the command to make over the government to Cassio. As she hears the news, Desdemona says, “ I am glad on't ” ; and Othello says to her—“ I am glad to



see you mad." "Why, sweet Othello,"—Desdemona starts to speak, greatly wondering ; but he utters one word "Devil !" as he strikes her. Then as he goes out after having turned Desdemona away from the place, Lodovico asks :

"Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate  
Call all-in-all sufficient?—Is this the nature  
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue  
The shot of accident nor dart of chance  
Could neither graze nor pierce?"

*Iago.* He is much chang'd.

*Lod.* Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?"

Lodovico echoes our own thoughts. Othello is out of his right mind. In the final bed-chamber scene, he dreads that his fury may yield to pity, that his obsession may disappear, that he may become his real self. There are moving passages in this scene in which contrition and compassion find expression, and he seeks to find in frantic effort excuses for the step he contemplates :

"Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.  
Put out the light, and then put out the light :  
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,  
I can again thy former light restore,  
Should I repent me ; but once put out thy light,  
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume."

His pupils are dilated and his eyes seem to come out of their sockets. Desdemona notices the signs of madness, and says to him :

"For you are fatal then  
When your eyes roll so."



But he has no mercy. He smothers her, and as she stirs no longer, his madness disappears. The insanity which had made him so different from what he really is, leaves him. And then he is horrified at the enormity of his deed. He is recalled to it by the voice of Emilia demanding entrance. He has done a fell deed. He could never have conceived of it in his clear mind. How can heaven and earth stand while they look on a deed such as this?

“ My wife ! my wife ! what wife ? I have no wife.  
O, insupportable ! O heavy hour !  
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration.”

As Emilia enters and announces that a foul murder has been done, Othello explains that it must have been done by a mad man :

“ It is the very error of the moon ;  
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont,  
And makes men mad.”

No one in his senses could have done this act. And then, as his own wits have resumed their function, he is alarmed. What will people say when they learn of Desdemona's murder ? Will they believe that he was mad at the time ? Even if they do will they not punish him ? The instinct of self-preservation makes him for a moment cling to the confession of Desdemona : “ You heard her say herself it was not I.” But only for a moment. Life without her is worth nothing. He has regained his senses, but during his insanity he has done a deed that deprives him of all joy and interest in life. He confesses his sin. But the tragedy will not end thus mercifully. Othello hangs over his wife and weeps so that his heart is likely to burst. Iago



stabs Emilia. Othello is further shocked : “ are there no stones in heaven but what serve for the thunder ? ” He knows not how he has acted as he has. “ Who can control his fate ? ” His wife, whom he has murdered, is cold, cold, even like her chastity. He is disillusioned. “ Dear general, I never gave you cause,” murmurs Cassio, and Othello replies, “ I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.”

Thus have events happened : thus far Othello has misexpressed himself. He had lacked nothing to make him perfectly happy. He had honour, love, health. The whole of his life promised peace and quiet and repose. He was respected and feared. Then, unexpectedly, from the grim unknown, came a breath of wind, and all his greatness and constancy and nobility melted like snow. He had gone through adventures with the Anthropophagi and was a mighty warrior. But he had acted so that every puny whipster gets his sword. He was supremely blessed in the love of Desdemona ; but he has killed her with his own eyes. All that made life worth while even after he had declined into the vale of years has departed. He is alone and sorrowful and in calm despair. He can see clearly and he sees how sadly he has mishandled the situation. It is true he was not responsible for his acts ; but he can hold none else responsible. Before he leaves the sorry stage of life, he will show that he has not been himself ; he will see that his cause is reported aright ; he will not leave a false impression behind. He is eager and anxious to make a full revelation so that he may be fairly judged. He is great ; he asks for no mercy. ✕ He says to the Venetians :

“ Soft you, a word or two before you go.

I have done the state some service, and they

know't ;—

No more of that.”



But he will not depend only on his past deeds. Deeds, he has bitterly realised, can be such false reflections of a man's real character.

“ I pray you, in your letters,  
 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
 Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate,  
 Nor set down aught in malice : then must  
you speak  
 Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well ;  
 Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,  
 Perplex'd in the extreme ” ;

This word ‘ perplex'd ’ is important, as indicating his consciousness of the fact that he was not quite in his right mind. Then, lest he should have been crueller to Desdemona than to himself he stabs himself. He had kissed her ere he killed her ; he will, killing himself, die upon a kiss. In spite of his tragic end, Cassio truly expresses the view of his survivors and of those who read the play—

“ He was great of heart.”

✓ It is tragic that Othello should die thus ; tragic that Desdemona should be smothered ; tragic that Emilia should be stabbed. We do not despair because before the end normal men re-establish their supremacy and normal events will happen again. During the interim things had gone wrong, but only for a while. x

( 7 )

If I have not wearied your patience by this unconscionably long analysis of the working of the mind of the Moor of Venice, and if, as I hope, I have demonstrated that the tragedy is mainly caused by a cloud that had temporarily darkened his brain, I may now proceed to a consideration



of Macbeth. It is important to remember that a tragic hero in Shakespeare is always a great man and essentially a good man. The poet's tragic aim will not be fulfilled if the hero is a villain whom we detest and whose degradation and ruin satisfies our sense of right and wrong. The tragic feeling is produced by the fact of the hero being noble and good and great but acting so as to achieve a destiny which is cruel and which he does not quite deserve. He achieves this not because he is what he is, not because, as Novalis says, character is destiny, but because he is for the time being what in reality he is not, because he mis-expresses in deeds his true nature, because for some reason he allows his reason and instinct to be dominated by a passion which is not normal with him. This domination or obsession is short-lived, but it succeeds in bringing about tragedy. Before the end, the mistake is realised. Too late, the hero wakes up from his trance ; too late, he realises the terrible obsession under which he has laboured ; too late, he sees the end of his dreams of happiness and success. But he will make one last effort, a final spurt, to reassert himself, to rehabilitate himself with the world, to exhibit his real greatness. If he die thereafter, it will be with the consolatory hope that he will be assessed in proper measure.

X Macbeth is perfectly good and noble when the play begins. His name is first mentioned by the bleeding soldier, when he says :

“ For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name,—  
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,  
Which smok'd with bloody execution,  
Like valour's minion,  
Carv'd out his passage till he fac'd the slave.”

The good impression we thus form of him from this



description is strengthened by Duncan's ejaculation—"O valiant cousin ! worthy gentleman !" To the question if Macbeth and Banquo were not dismayed by the fresh assault of the Norweyan lord, the soldier replies—"Yes ; as sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion." The old King is very pleased with him and confers on ' noble Macbeth ' the title of Thane of Cawdor. When we see him first Banquo refers to him as ' my noble partner.' Here we get the first hint that Macbeth may not in the coming days be brave, valiant, and noble, that an influence may be at work to make him weak and puny under it, that he may be the unknowing but proper author of his own woe. When the witches address him he does not at first take them seriously. Glamis, Cawdor, and King ! Wonderful prospect, indeed, but surely, surely impossible. He is inclined to dismiss the words as being vain and idle. But the demon of ambition starts working. Cawdor, why not ? King ! Well, why not ? He does not quite surrender his will yet to ambition, but it begins already, at a bound, to dominate over him. Circumstances combine to hasten this domination. Ross addresses him as Thane of Cawdor. What, were the witches right after all ?

" Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor ;  
The greatest is behind."

Can the instruments of darkness tell us the truth ? Should he, the noble, the brave, the heroic Macbeth, allow himself to be influenced by them ? He is in a suspense. His real character sees the coming danger : the good within him is struggling faintly under the dead weight of this incubus :

" This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill ; cannot be good :—if ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth ? I am Thane of Cawdor :



If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings :  
My thought, whose murder yet is but  
fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smother'd in surmise ; and nothing is  
But what is not."

Here we have an indication of what we may expect—  
" nothing is but what is not." Macbeth will not be himself ; Lady Macbeth will not be a gracious lady. The laws of hospitality, gratitude, loyalty, mercy, pity—all these will be non-existent for some time. Macbeth will be full, not of the milk of human kindness, but of gall and blood and horror. One effort more he makes to retain self-control :

" If chance will have me king, why chance  
may crown me,  
Without my stir."

The king and his friends of course still think well of him. He is the king's ' worthiest cousin.' But already he has been yielding to this obsession : " Stars, hide your fires," he exclaims, " let not light see my black and deep desires." Even as he leaves the king's presence Duncan refers to him as ' a peerless kinsman.' Lady Macbeth of course knows him much more intimately ; but even she says he is too full of the milk of human kindness. He is not without ambition ; ' but without the illness should attend it.'

" What thou wouldst highly,  
That wouldst thou holily."



But he is to be very different. Lady Macbeth desires to pour her spirits in his ears, but she little realises that he will descend to depths of iniquity and horror which she cannot imagine, which will alienate him from her, and which will frighten her so that she will get no rest even in sleep. His efforts at self-control become feebler and feebler, he becomes more and more an ambitious automaton. The poet reveals some hesitation in Macbeth's mind before Duncan's murder to suggest the faint glimmerings of good, but thereafter all the good is silenced. When the deed is done, the sight of blood recalls him for a moment to his real self :

“ Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No ; this my hand will  
rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.”

But ambition will teach him cunning ; he can play his part well. He will not henceforth retrace his steps. He will go the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire. He will be a different man, proceeding, shod in iron, over corpse after corpse, rushing from sin to sin, losing friends and supporters, finding nothing in return, nothing to soothe him and console him for what he has lost. He lives now in constant fear. He kills the bewildered warders of the king's chamber. He desires the death of Banquo and of Fleance and gets the former murdered, though the latter escapes. There is not a single lord but in his house he keeps a servant fee'd. The very firstlings of his heart shall be the firstlings of his hand. He decides to

“ Give to the edge o' the sword  
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls  
That trace him in his line.”



His mad self is apprehensive lest his sane self should reassert its supremacy, so

“ This deed I'll do before this purpose cool.”

So cruelly has Macbeth acted that Scotland is now a country

“ Where nothing,

But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile.”

Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep, and rubs her hand for a quarter of an hour, and speaks what she should not, and her heart is sorely charged. After all this havoc and ruin and bloodshed, Macbeth's obsession leaves him. He sees what he has done and he is not so much horrified as depressed : ✕

“ I have liv'd long enough : my way of life  
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf ;  
And that which should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I must not look to have.”

✓ With this realisation, the scales fall from his eyes and he regains the balance he had lost. There has been tragedy, and plenty of it. He has supped full with horrors. Life has no more illusion with which to tempt him. He has nothing to live for. But it is worth while having passed through this tragedy because it has brought a recognition of the fact that life lived as Macbeth has recently lived it is worthless. He had hoped for the palm and he finds dust : ✕

“ Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
To the last syllable of recorded time ;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools



The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
 Signifying nothing."

( 8 )

✓ In *Lear* madness is described in a much more complete and detailed manner than in the other plays. Here we are not left to ourselves to conclude that the hero is mad; we see it, in his dress, in his words, in his acts. Apart from the beginning where a fatal mistake is made by the old king and from the end where he quite regains his sanity, the play is a careful study in madness. The king is on a fair way to madness when the play begins, he becomes mad, and then madder, and finally he has a brief lucid moment. The tragedy is due to the fact that the old king's blunders issue from what is essentially good and noble. He is very trusting; he is very loving. He becomes too trustful and demands too much from love. While he was young his defects did not much matter; in his old age they ruin him. Luckily he does not suffer the extreme sorrows of his position because a merciful dispensation makes him mad. This madness heightens our sense of tragedy, but it allows the poet to pour grief after grief upon the old king. Because he is insensible the tragedy can be tolerated; because he has some moments of lucid thinking, it is a grievous tragedy. ✕

The old Lear who has lived too long wisely desires to give up the cares of state and to pass his last days in peace and rest and in the company of his three daughters whom he loves. The two eldest make violent professions of devotion to their father. The youngest loves him most



and is his own favourite ; so he expects that she will be even more impassioned in the declaration of her affection :

“ Now, our joy,  
Although the last, not least ;  
.....what can you say to draw  
A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.”

Cordelia replies, " Nothing, my lord." Lear can hardly believe his ears. ' Nothing?' he asks in shocked wonder. The truthful, loving Cordelia repeats, ' Nothing.' Lear loses his balance ; so little is needed to upset an old man's balance. He receives a wound that will rankle. He cannot reconcile himself to this. He had loved her most and had thought to set his rest on her kind nursery. He lets his fury burst out in words:

" Let it be so,—thy truth, then, be thy dower :  
For by the sacred radiance of the sun,  
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night ;  
By all the operation of the orbs,  
From whom we do exist and cease to be ;  
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,  
Propinquity, and property of blood,  
And as a stranger to my heart and me  
Hold thee, from this for ever.      The barbarous  
   Scythian,  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom  
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied, and reliev'd,  
As thou my sometime daughter."

He has lost self-control, and before many days are over he will lose himself. Kent calls it his ' hideous rashness ' ; Kent's reward is a command to turn his hated back upon the kingdom. This is the second evil deed performed by



the king in his fury. The madness is observed by the king of France who expostulates with him:

“ This is most strange,  
That she who even but now was your best object,  
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,  
Most best, most dearest, should in this trice of time  
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle  
So many folds of favour.”

He suggests that his affection is ‘ fallen into taint.’ Lear’s coming madness is observed by his two shrewd daughters who thus discuss it as soon as they are alone:

“ *Gon.* You see how full of changes his age is ; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always loved our sister most ; and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

*Reg.* ’Tis the infirmity of his age : yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

*Gon.* The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash.”

Even before his old age he was subject to violent fits of passion ; now the resistance is feebler, the provocation irresistible, and the prolonged madness is not surprising. Gloster marvels too at the king’s action—“ all this done upon the gad ! ” Lear so far forgets his dignity as to strike his daughter’s servant Oswald. He is charged with madness by Goneril:

“ I would you would make use of your good wisdom,  
Whereof I know you are fraught ; and put away  
These dispositions, which of late transport you  
From what you rightly are.”



This further maddens him and he exclaims :

“ Does any here know me?—This is not Lear ” :

He is furious with Goneril, calls her degenerate bastard, and decides forthwith to leave her. The ingratitude of this unnatural child brings him to a realisation of the madness that made him banish Cordelia :

“ O Lear, Lear, Lear !

Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in

*[Striking his head*

And thy dear judgment out ! ”

He is so full of fury, of anger, of repentance, and these conflicting emotions torture him so mercilessly that he feels he is losing his senses. Homeless in his own kingdom, spurned by the daughters he has enriched, separated by his own folly from the daughter he loves, the old king dreads the yet further disaster of madness which seems to come upon him with such speed. He utters a pathetic prayer :

“ O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven !  
Keep me in temper: I would not be mad ! ”

He hopes for better treatment from Regan, and when he is disappointed with her also, he reverts to his dread of madness :

“ I pr'ythee, daughter, do not make me mad. ”

His mood changes in a few minutes. He gives up all hope. He has tried all: he has even begged, on bended knees, for raiment, bed and food. He has reminded them of filial obligations, of gratitude, of all that man holds sacred. But all in vain. He might as well have addressed the wind that blows or the stream that runs. He might have spoken to the stars with more effect. He is fast sinking



under the unnatural strain. Even in his vigour this stroke would have been hard to bear ; but he is infirm, and has been bit in his heart by sharp-tooth'd unkindness. He rouses himself now to anger.

“ You think I'll weep ;  
No, I'll not weep:—  
I have full cause of weeping ; but this heart  
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws  
Or ere I'll weep.”

And then comes the heart-rending cry, once more:

“ O fool, I shall go mad! ”

He does go mad. ‘ Let me not be mad ’ ; ‘ do not make me mad ’ ; ‘ I shall go mad ’—through these three stages he has passed and is now actually mad.) He is described as contending with the fretful elements ; tearing his white hairs ; running unbonneted to out-scorn the to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain. Kent describes his sorrow as unnatural and bemadding. His speech is wandering and incoherent. When the Earl of Kent addresses him he seems to regain his senses, and says: “ My wits begin to turn,” and sees the Fool who has followed him in his desolate misery—“ Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart that's sorry yet for thee.” The thought of his daughters and their ingratitude he cannot bear. He can think and speak of other subjects, but regarding Goneril and Regan—

“ O, that way madness lies ; let me shun that ;  
No more of that.”

In the hardships of nature, in the tempest and the wrathful skies and the sheets of fire he finds refuge from this maddening thought. In the hope that in the hovel he will pray and then he will sleep he tries to go in. But the poet will not let the miserable king have the balm of sleep ; he



will bring him into contact with poor Tom, Edgar, in his pretended form ; as though the situation was not tragic enough he will put an old man on the verge of madness and on the brink of nature's confine face to face with an ill-used young man who for his own safety is merely playing at madness. Lear recognises that the young man is mad and asks him :

“ Didst thou give all to thy daughters?  
And art thou come to this?”

With the wisdom of the lunatic he contradicts Kent:

“ Death, traitor! nothing could have subdu'd nature  
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.”

Then he tries to look exactly like poor Tom. He is quite mad now and tries to imitate Edgar : “ Thou art the thing itself : unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.—Off, off, you lendings!—Come, unbutton here. (*Tearing off his clothes*) ”

By the time Gloster comes in to take him to the house, his wits are quite gone. He wants a word with the learned Theban ; he asks the philosopher the cause of thunder ; he will go accompanied by the good Athenian. When he enters the farm-house he arranges a trial. He asks the most learned justicer Edgar and the Fool the most sapient sir to take their seats. The others enter into the spirit of his madness and good-naturedly subscribe to his whim. All at once he becomes violent. “ False justicer, why has thou let her 'scape? ” And then he starts thinking of his favourite dogs—Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart. Once more sleep is about to come to him. If his brain can have rest, all may yet be well. He says :

“ Make no noise, make no noise ; draw the  
curtains.”



And so there is hope ; but the chance of recovery is doomed ; even as he settles down to the rest and safe harbour of sleep, Gloster comes to announce a plot against him. Kent says :

“ Oppress’d nature sleeps :—

This rest might yet have balm’d thy

broken sinews.”

When next we are told about him, it is in Cordelia’s description of him to the physician. He was as mad as the vex’d sea, singing aloud, crown’d with rank fumiter.

“ What can man’s wisdom

In the restoring his bereaved sense?

He that helps him take all my outward worth.”

The physician promises that repose, the foster-nurse of nature, will close the eye of anguish. We are led now to hope that after all there may be a last spell of peace and happiness for the sorely tried old man. Once more, however, and in the height of his madness we are to see Lear before he meets Cordelia. He says they cannot touch him for coining ; he is the king himself. His wits are plainly wandering :

“ Nature’s above art in that respect.—There’s your press-money. That fellow handles his bow like a crow-keeper : draw me a clothier’s yard.—Look, look, a mouse ! Peace, peace ;—this piece of toasted cheese will do’t.—There’s my gauntlet ; I’ll prove it on a giant.—Bring up the brown bills.—O, well flown, bird !—i’ the clout, i’ the clout : hewgh !—Give the word.”

And so on through a scene that is a prolonged torture, that calls forth our pity incessantly and from the deepest wells of nature. The climax is reached when Cordelia’s



gentlemen come to take him to his most dear daughter, and speak respectfully to him, and he hears the accents of deference and kindness in bewilderment, and says :

“ Use me well ;

You shall have ransom. Let me have surgeons ;  
I am cut to the brains.”

But he gets wild again, and runs away from them. The physician puts him to sleep. Cordelia prays to the kind gods to wind up his untun'd and jarring senses. The physician has no doubt that he will be temperate when he wakes up. Lear wakes up as music is being played, and he finds himself attired and in bed, and is addressed by Cordelia. He is wonder-struck :

“ You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave :—  
Thou art a soul in bliss.”

When Cordelia asks for his benediction he remembers how he had ill-treated her :

“ Pray, do not mock me :

I am a very foolish fond old man,  
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.  
Methinks I should know you, and know this man ;  
Yet I am doubtful : for I am mainly ignorant  
What place this is ; and all the skill I have  
Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not  
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh  
at me ,

For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia.”

What wonderful pathos is concentrated in the simple commonplace phrase ‘ my child ’ ! How carefully does



this passage convey the sense of movement from a trance to consciousness—the feeling of surprise and of wonder, of diffidence in the faithfulness of one's own observation, of suspicion that others may be making fun of one ! There can be no doubt that the poet traces here the passage from insanity to sanity.

Dr. Somerville suggests that, as usual with the other tragic heroes, 'the victim must be made more mad before he is utterly destroyed.' On the contrary I have attempted to demonstrate that he is perfectly sane before he dies. His death is not the main tragic fact ; it is rather the obsession that makes him misexpress himself for a while. If Lear had died in his madness, the tragedy would not have been as intense as it is in the play. ✕

When Lear is satisfied that Cordelia is really there to help him he says simply—"You must bear with me : pray you now, forget and forgive : I am old and foolish." But even Cordelia comes to grief ; she and Lear are made prisoners. But Lear does not mind it. He has been through hell ; he has been through every imaginable horror. At the end he has found Cordelia. What does he care for the minor ills of life ? He has Cordelia's love, and he will suffer everything most cheerfully.

"Come, let's away to prison :

We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage."

But no such happiness is possible to the miserable old king. When next we see him he has the dead Cordelia in his arms. His wits are about to wander again. "She's gone for ever." And then a last hope comes to him that life may yet be lingering within her. That is a chance which will redeem all sorrows that ever he felt. But alas, she is dead.

"I might have sav'd her ; now she's gone for ever !—



Cordelia, Cordelia ! stay a little. Ha !

What is't thou sayest?—Her voice was ever soft,  
Gentle and low,—an excellent thing in woman."

He dies, praising Cordelia in his last breath. Death has come to him as a relief. The faithful Kent knows him well :

" Vex not his ghost : O, let him pass ! he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this rough world  
Stretch him out longer."

✓ He is dead indeed, but not in ignorance. He has seen the fidelity of Kent before the end, and he has held Cordelia in his arms. Goneril and Regan and Edmund are dead, and with them the forces of evil are vanquished. Gloster and Cordelia and Lear suffer, but while we pity them we can reconcile ourselves to the world because we feel they need not have suffered. They have suffered because of Lear's folly. In normal circumstances they would not have suffered. " This shows you are above, you justicers," we may repeat in Albany's words. ✕

*Beautiful and sweet is death.* (9) ✓  
The question of the madness of Hamlet has been discussed at some length in another paper. I have there expressed the view that Hamlet's madness is ' put on,' and I adhere to it. But while the ' antic disposition ' is assumed only of set purpose, the cause of the tragedy is still the same as in the other plays—that the hero, during the period of the play, is not quite himself. Hamlet's madness is really unimportant. He pretends that he is mad ; but this pretence is entirely unnecessary for the purposes of the play. Hamlet imagines that this pretence is needed because he can examine other people more easily and because it will ward off from him all suspicion that he is taking steps to avenge the king's murder. It is only a



means he employs to satisfy his conscience that he is really very active, to silence his self-reproach at having allowed the ghost's behest to be set aside, to delude himself into the fancy that he is doing all that is necessary to punish Claudius. Horatio, whom his soul has sealed for herself, and whom he bears in his heart's core, ay, in his heart of hearts, never considers him to be mad, not even once ; and, indeed, the king does not believe that he is mad. This madness does not help Hamlet in the least, but rather provides an excuse for his exile. Nor is his own design helped forward by it at all. What is of importance in our appreciation of the tragedy, <sup>✓</sup>what is really responsible for the fact of the tragedy is Hamlet's temporary disinclination to act. Normally he is active, quick in determination, even rash ; but in this play he delays and postpones and puts off his revenge until after many deaths have been caused and he is himself on the point of death. That, then, is the tragedy, that something has clouded his mind and numbed his powers for the moment. Before this period Hamlet had been almost perfect. ✕ Even allowing for Ophelia's partiality we recognise the truth of her description :

“ O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown !  
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue,  
sword :

The expectancy and rose of the fair state,  
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,  
The observ'd of all observers,—quite, quite  
down ! . . . . .

O, woe is me,  
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see ! ”

She is under the impression, it is true, that his noble and most sovereign reason has become out of tune and harsh ;



but we also repeat the question and ask why Hamlet has taken the line of least resistance and allowed matters to drift. The change that has come over him puzzles him also, and on more than one occasion he expresses his bewilderment.

Let us trace this change that has come over him, that completely controls him for a while, and that disappears at the end only after much ruin and waste and bloodshed. We first hear of him as 'young Hamlet' to whom Horatio will impart what he has seen on the platform before the Castle, just before the morn, in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of the high eastern hill. We actually see Hamlet for the first time in a room of state, in the company of Claudius, and his mother, and Polonius and Laertes. The king addresses him as 'my cousin Hamlet, and my son,' and the prince says in an aside, "A little more than kin, and less than kind." Dr. Somerville is inclined to look upon this as a case of *Œdipus* complex, though he does not actually use the phrase. He says—"The two men had this in common, that they both were worshippers at the shrine of the same goddess. And thus it comes about that whereas the conscious mind of Hamlet can find in Claudius only a loathed enemy, his subconscious blindly identifies his own personality with that of the lover of his mother." Mr. Clutton Brock takes a more satisfactory view when he says: "The shock which he suffered on hearing of the murder, and particularly on realising the full horror of his mother's remarriage, made, as it were, a wound in his mind, which hurt whenever he thought of the murder, or of his uncle, or of his mother's connexion with his uncle. The pain of the wound was so sharp that, unconsciously, he flinched from it and seized every pretext to forget it." This would seem to be a fairly correct explanation. Before the ghost's



revelations are made Hamlet is quite active and energetic. It is true that he replies to the king in ironical terms, but the melancholy and depression are natural, for has he not lost his father in mysterious circumstances, has not his mother remarried in unseemly haste, and has he not been deprived of his succession to the throne? His mind is thus oppressed with melancholia, with 'manic-depressive,' and he is sick of life. His soliloquies—in which he is himself—reveal his mentality completely. In his very first soliloquy we see him expressing his weariness, his sense that there is nothing to live for, and above all his shock at his mother's conduct :

“ But two months dead !—nay, not so much,  
not two ;  
 So excellent a king ; that was, to this,  
 Hyperion to a satyr : so loving to my mother,  
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth !  
 Must I remember ? ”

He is disgusted with his mother's conduct. But he is contemplating cutting the Gordian knot by letting the solid flesh melt, thaw and resolve itself into a dew. He is so sick of it all that he will not continue to live. When this mood has taken possession of him, Horatio brings him news of the ghost's visit. What can this mean? “ Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me.” He decides, in a moment—“ I will watch tonight.” In spite of his depression he can still arrive at a quick decision. He will see the ghost. When the next scene opens, we find Laertes warning Ophelia against Hamlet ; his favour is only the perfume and suppliance of a minute. Polonius also has heard that the prince has given very oft of late private time to her ; and Ophelia confesses that he has made many tenders



of his affection to her, that he has importuned her with love in honourable fashion, and that he has given countenance to his speech with almost all the holy vows of heaven. He has been willing to occupy himself as any normal-minded young man of his age in thoughts of love, and he has been fortunate enough to win the love of the beautiful Ophelia. Hamlet is warned, next, by Marcellus and Horatio against going with the ghost to a more removed ground. But Hamlet is firm and resolute—"I'll follow it," and as he is being restrained by his friends—"By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." No trace of vacillation or indecision or purposeless speculation. On the contrary he is active to the point of rashness, for he does not set his life at a pin's fee.

Even when the ghost calls upon him to take revenge his determination is firm:

"Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift  
As meditation or the thoughts of love,  
May sweep to my revenge."

He swears to remember the ghost while memory holds a seat in his distracted globe. After it has disappeared and his friends arrive, he pledges them to secrecy, but what is the terrible fact about which he has taken them into confidence? Why, merely this, that "there's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark but he's an arrant knave!" Before many moments are over he exclaims,

"The time is out of joint:—O cursed spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right!"

What a contrast is this with the determination to 'sweep' to his revenge which he had expressed to the ghost! He was quite honest and sincere then. Why does he suddenly change? Why does he speak of 'cursed spite'? Why has fixed resolve begun to change into disinclination, distaste,



vacillation, inaction? This is the root of the tragedy. This change in Hamlet is the germ of all the ruin that ensues. If Hamlet had indeed—as he had intended originally—swept to his revenge, Claudius would have been killed, but there would have been no tragedy. That he postpones his revenge is tragic. All of a sudden something has happened. ✕ What is it? The explanation seems to be that there are two main thoughts in his mind—resolve to punish his uncle and shocked grief at his mother's misconduct. His father's ghost also had emphasised these two aspects, but it had pleaded for mercy and consideration for Gertrude. In Hamlet's mind it is the thought of his mother that assumes greater importance than that of his uncle. If he had allowed himself to brood over the latter's guilt principally, things would not have gone wrong ; it is because he thinks more of his mother's guilt that he allows the native hue of resolution to be sicklied over with the pale cast of thought. He cannot brood long over the revenge because immediately the thought of his mother comes into his mind. ✕ This thought wounds him and this wound is kept green by every fresh attempt to think. He cannot explain this himself and he heaps reproaches on himself. The first time he thus blames himself is after the players have been welcomed by him to Elsinore and he hears the passage about Pyrrhus and Hecuba. He calls himself a rogue and peasant slave, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, an ass, a scullion— all these choice phrases he applies to himself because he has not fatted all the region kites with this slave's offal. But here again, the mere thought of his uncle recalls his mother. Not much later we find him alone, not meditating, as we might expect, on his revenge, devising plans and schemes, but rapt in more or less academic speculation on the relative merits of life now and life hereafter. He is as weary

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of life now as he was before he had met the ghost. He has not swept to his revenge, but he is nevertheless thinking of leaving the world, with his task of revenge yet unfulfilled. It is not the thought of duty left incomplete which worries him ; indeed he does not even mention it. If he does not make his quietus with a bare bodkin, it is because he has a dread of something after death. Thus we see the marvellous change that has come over him. He is letting his duty remain in the dim background ; but it is nonetheless an obsession that prevents him from being himself. The burden of it is too irksome and heavy ; he cannot throw it off, either by not thinking of it or by doing it speedily and thus fulfilling it. His daily life is thus lived under its terrible shadow. Waking and dreaming it presses on him like a nightmare. It makes him cruel ; it makes him shed innocent blood ; it forces him into a quarrel with Laertes ; it makes him speak daggers to his mother. He says to Ophelia—" I never gave you aught "—he who had fallen to such perusal of her face as he would draw it ; he asks her, ' Are you honest ? ' ' Are you fair ? ' ; he bids her go to a nunnery. He has at the back of his mind the hope that at some future date he may be free from his present obsession and then be in a position to wed her. He reproaches himself again after the play-scene and resolves upon action:

“ 'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes  
Contagion to this world : now could I drink hot  
And do such bitter business as the day  
Would quake to look on.”

He has an opportunity to 'do it pat,' for he finds the king



alone. But he will blunder again. Only this disinclination to act is so unnatural in him that to satisfy himself he has to find an excuse for not acting.

“ He took my father grossly, full of bread ;  
 With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May ;  
 And how his audit stands who knows save heaven ?  
 But in our circumstance and course of thought  
 ’Tis heavy with him: and am I, then, reveng’d,  
 To take him in the purging of his soul,  
 When he is fit and season’d for his passage ?”

This explanation does not, however, quite still the inner voice within him ; so he adopts the common expedient of making an exaggerated resolve ; he asks his sword to know a more horrid bent. On every other subject he can think coherently. He even makes a pass through the arras on sudden provocation, and kills the wretched Polonius. When he meets Fortinbras, he reproaches himself again:

“ I do not know  
 Why yet I live to say, *This thing’s to do* ;  
 Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and  
means  
 To do’t.....O, from this time forth,  
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth.”

But when we see him next, he is eager to discuss with Horatio the ethics of the dust, the grave-digger’s occupation, and the fine pate full of fine dirt. He will talk with the grave-digger for a long while, forgetting or unmindful of his ‘ bloody ’ thoughts and his blunted purpose. He mourns over the skull of poor Yorick, his gibes, his gambols, his songs, and his flashes of merriment. He talks of Alexander and imperial Cæsar. But as soon as he sees Laertes leap into Ophelia’s grave he also straightway advances to leap in. He has forgotten his sacred



task of revenge. For the moment he is beside himself with grief ; he is impassioned ; he expresses his determination to drink up eisel, to eat a crocodile. He is again more full of sorrow than of anger. He tells his mother :

“ I lov'd Ophelia ; forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum.”

After this episode he asks Horatio if he should not now take revenge. But Osric takes his thoughts away from the subject of revenge to that of affected speech, of the duel with Laertes, and of his being in continual practice. Not a word of revenge against the king, but once more, and for the last time, a passage expressing extreme weariness with the world. He is not like a man on the eve of a great achievement, about to do his duty, and sighing thereafter for peace. He is one longing for escape from life. Is not Ophelia dead and is he not to fight one whom he does not hate?

“ But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

*Hor.* Nay, good my lord,—

*Ham.* It is but foolery ; but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman. We defy augury : there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, <sup>'t is</sup> not to come ; if it be not to come, it will <sup>s r</sup> now ; if it be now, yet it will come : the readiness is all ; since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?”

When the duel begins, Hamlet expresses neither by word nor by gesture his consciousness that though he is so weary



of life he has still his duty unperformed. He fights with Laertes and gets the better of him. The queen swoons and as she dies declares she is poisoned. This rouses Hamlet as nothing else could have. He has loved his mother with rare devotion. For her sake he has let himself be miserable all this time. His father's ghost had asked him to have special care of her. And she is poisoned ! He takes command of the situation. The incubus is lifted from his breast. He is what he would have been but for this incubus, a strong, resolute, quick-witted prince. He issues the command, ignoring the king, "Ho ! let the door be lock'd ; treachery ! seek it out ! " Hamlet proves himself most royally. Laertes reveals how the foul practice has turned itself on him : " the king, the king's to blame." One more ground of complaint against this king of shreds and patches, one more count against a vice of kings, one more offence for which the cutpurse of the empire must pay. His own mother is dead: dearly has she paid for her transgression ; Ophelia is dead: grievously has she suffered, though she so little deserved any suffering. But this man who has exalted iniquity lives yet. Now Hamlet will act as he should have acted much earlier ; now he will not lose himself in abstract theorising ; he will not express his discontent with life. Indeed, in him there is not half an hour of life. Quick as thought, he now sweeps to his revenge :

" ~~The~~ point envenom'd too !—

~~For~~ venom to thy work." [*Stabs the King.*

How easy was it to do this earlier ? Then Polonius would not have been stabbed, Ophelia not drowned, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern not ' gone to't,' Laertes not killed, and Gertrude not poisoned. More than all this, Hamlet would not have been killed. All this tragic waste is caused by



Hamlet's disinclination to take revenge, by a struggle between his will and his inclination, by an obsession that compelled him to blunder along through all this ruin and desolation and bloodshed. X

But the sands of his own life are running out. He has established once more the sovereign sway of righteousness. He realises that people will not understand him aright ; if he could live a little longer he would explain it all. But he will leave behind him his friend Horatio who will set Hamlet right in men's eyes. He can die in peace. He will now solve the many problems relating to the undiscovered country about which he used to be puzzled. He will obtain felicity. Ophelia is there and his mother and his father. With his last breath he will utter his vote which will save the kingdom from dispute. He has not been able to do much for it while he lived ; at the moment of death he atones for what has been his misfortune more than his fault. To the sound of the dead march, with the soldier's music and the rites of war he is borne like a soldier to the stage. Horatio will join him before long—"good night, sweet prince," he says and not good-bye. Better to die like Hamlet, unfulfilled, young, widely mourned than to live like Claudius, detested, unwept, and sinful. That we learn from the play. X The too too solid flesh has melted ; self-slaughter has not been necessary : and blunderingly, mistakenly, through many delays, the righteous act of revenge has been performed. And at the end flights of angels will sing the prince to his rest.

A word must be said of the madness of Ophelia. This is not of any special importance in the development of the tragic idea, except to aggravate our sense of pity. When first we see her she is a sprightly bright, witty young girl, exchanging sallies with, and getting the better of Laertes. She is supremely happy for is she not loved by



Hamlet, the expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion and the mould of form? She loves her father also. She receives the first shock of her life—she whose life has hitherto been bright, carefree and sheltered—when the lord Hamlet visits her and takes her by the wrist, and holds her hand, and goes away saying nothing. He is shocked but her prime feeling is one of tender pity and concern :

“ He rais’d a sigh so piteous and profound  
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being.”

She is reassured when she receives a letter addressed “ to the celestial and my soul’s idol,” and expressing his profound love for her. The queen hopes Ophelia’s good beauties and her virtues will bring him to his wonted ways again, and Ophelia sincerely hopes, “ Madam, I wish it may.” And so she is left there, “ as ’twere by accident,” when Hamlet comes, with his mind far away from the present, absorbed in contemplation of eternal problems, thinking of death and sleep and dream. All of a sudden he discovers Ophelia sitting and reading a book—

“ Soft you now !  
The fair Ophelia.—Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember’d.”

But even as he utters these gentle words, so touching in their suggestion of distance between the speaker and the person addressed, he resumes his ironical and bitter style, partly to frighten her and partly to live up to his character as a lunatic. “ I never gave you aught.” Poor maiden ; what is she to make of this declaration after the statement in his letter—“ That I love thee best, O most best, believe it.” ? “ I loved you not,” he persists in saying. “ I was the more deceived,” says Ophelia. She



can only exclaim, "O, help him, you sweet heavens!" "O, heavenly powers, restore him!" But for a little while, once before their end, Hamlet betrays his fondness for her—in the play-scene when he lies down at her feet and rests his head upon her lap. His talk is still bitter and cynical and even obscene. Evidently he desires to shock and repel her. And Hamlet goes to England without seeing her. And he kills her father Polonius. This is enough to drive her wits out of her. Laertes is still abroad. She is alone. Her lover is in exile and perhaps is no longer her lover. Her father has been murdered. No wonder she is distract: her mood will needs be pitied. When she comes we remember her as we first saw her exchanging sallies with her brother. Now her speech is nothing. She sings incoherent songs, partly about her lover and partly about her father. One or two snatches are vulgar. Desdemona, who had shrunk from using the word 'whore' and had merely asked "Am I that name?" could yet in her distraction mingle with the song of willow some indecent lines. This is the result of repression. Purity and innocence keep these longings of the flesh under restraint; but when the conscious mind does not function, they come to the surface. So Ophelia, rose of May, young and pure of heart, sings indecent love songs. This moves our pity more than anything else. All the fancies she had repressed, all the dreams she had dreamt, all the images she had conjured up in the secret sanctity of her mind are now revealed when she is no more mistress over herself. She is insane. She goes out, but returns before many minutes are past. She comes fantastically dressed with straws and flowers. She utters a document in madness; her nothing's more than matter. She is insane; she does not know what she is saying. She is not cunning as many madmen are. She is not aware of her pitiable condition.



“ There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance ; pray, love, remember : and there’s pansies, that’s for thoughts.”

In her sub-conscious mind she is thinking perhaps of Hamlet who seems to have forgotten her. Then she thinks of others she has known—her father, and Claudius, and Gertrude :

“ There’s fennel for you, and columbines :—  
there’s rue for you ; and here’s some for me :—  
we may call it herb-grace o’ Sundays :—O, you must wear your rue with a difference.—There’s a daisy !—I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died.”

It is appropriate that she who is innocent and pretty like flowers should speak of them. She has been rendered insane and perhaps with a gentle smile on her lips or loud laughter from her mouth or tears in her eyes she leaves the stage. We see her no more. But of her end we have a description from the queen. Perhaps as she leaves the stage with a prayer to God for all, she walks, knowingly or not, to the willow near the brook, and puts on fantastic garlands of nettles and daisies and long purples, and falls in the weeping brook, as she tries to crown the pendant boughs of the willow-tree. Awhile she floats on the surface, and chants snatches of old songs, but soon she is pulled to muddy death.

Her insanity and the death that followed must be attributed to Hamlet. It swells the note of sorrow, it adds to the waste and the ruin. But she will be, says Laertes, a ministering angel. Better that she should die thus than that she should survive Hamlet ; better that she should die without having the sense to realise the full tragedy of her death.

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